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Speaker: Honourable Tom Osborne, MHA

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The House resumed at 7 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): Order, please!

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I would call from the Order Paper, Order 3, Concurrence Motion, Report of the Social Services Committee.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Deputy Speaker.

MS. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll speak for a couple of minutes to Concurrence on the Social Services Committee. I got a little enthusiastic earlier this week when I tabled the motion and I proceeded into the details at that time. I'll take a little more time right now to explain the process maybe to some of the people who are listening.

I was responsible to Chair the Social Services Committee. There are three. There's the Resource Committee, Social Services Committee – what's the other one? I'm just forgetting. I'm looking for someone to help me out here. Resource Committee, Social Services Committee and there's one more, Mr. Speaker.

AN HON. MEMBER: Government Services.

MS. DEMPSTER: Government Services. Thank you, I say to my hon. colleague.

On the Social Services Committee, I will read the Members. They certainly all played a valuable role. It's a very time-consuming process but a very necessary, important process. On the Social Services Committee was the hon. the Member for Topsail – Paradise, the Member for Burin – Grand Bank, the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands, the Member for Harbour Main, the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune, the Member for St. George's – Humber and the Member for St. John's Centre.

Mr. Speaker, the Social Services Committee is responsible to oversee the budget Estimates process for eight departments. Those eight departments are: the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services, the Department of

Education and Early Childhood Development, Fire and Emergency Services, the Department of Health and Community Services; the Department of Justice and Public Safety, the Department of Municipal Affairs, the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, the Labour Relations Agency and the Department of Seniors, Wellness and Social Development.

Each year after the budget is brought down, no matter who the government of the day is, we go through a process for the next number of weeks in the Chamber called the Estimates process. That's where the minister comes into the Chamber with his senior team of officials and the Opposition and the Third Party get to go through the budget process line by line and ask questions.

Often, there might be discrepancies or differences maybe from a 2015 budget to a 2016 budget. In a certain department, you might see a difference of \$700,000 or \$800,000 or \$2 million. Because we are all here representing the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, just a voice for them, and because the finances that go through this House of Assembly are taxpayers' money, it is very, very important that we be transparent and very important that we be accountable. So that's the democracy that we live in. They ask questions and the minister answers as best he can.

Normally there are three hours allotted for the Estimates process, but it can be longer. I mentioned earlier the night that we sat for Justice and Public Safety I think we maybe went close to five hours –

AN HON. MEMBER: Four hours.

MS. DEMPSTER: Four hours, was it? The minister was very gracious in answering the questions that were asked of him.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, to the Members that sit in the Chamber, that make up the Social Services Committee, I must mention the Broadcast Centre downstairs. We don't see them, but every single day they are doing very valuable work. They are recording the things that we do in Hansard. Everything that comes out of our mouth is recorded forever in this

place, which sometimes can be a scary thought. They do a great job down there, so I want to thank them as well.

My first time – I had been a critic the last couple of budgets, Advanced Education and Skills and some other areas, but it was my first time chairing. We try to be as fair and non-partisan as we can and ensure that everybody gets their questions asked. I want to thank my fellow Committee Members. They did a great job showing up and if they couldn't, they took responsibility for ensuring that they had a substitute in their place.

Mr. Speaker, the Estimates of 2016 was all about the budget that was brought down on the 14th of April, a budget with a revenue of \$8.48 billion. We've been hearing a lot about the very difficult budget that was brought down and there's no doubt, but I think sometimes we lose sight of the fact that significant funds are still going into investing in providing services in Newfoundland and Labrador. I was certainly pleased to see a healthy portion of that coming to continue to build vital infrastructure in the part of the province that I call home, continuing on with the Trans-Labrador Highway, some repaving or levelling of Route 510 and a number of other things.

That's all I'm going to say, Mr. Speaker, in Concurrence about the Estimates process. It's a very important process. A friend of mine, a former MHA from this House, Sammy Slade for Carbonear – Harbour Grace before the electoral boundary reform, always used to refer to this place as the people's House. Absolutely, it is the people's House and we need to remind ourselves of that on a daily basis. Indeed, the work that we do here is the people's work.

It was a privilege for me to Chair the Social Services Committee and work through the Estimates process with my colleagues, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to stand in my place any time as well and represent the people of Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair. I look forward to continuing to work hard on their behalf.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

It's, indeed, a pleasure to get up here tonight and talk a little bit about the social services sector. The part that I'm going to speak a little bit about tonight is Municipal Affairs, where I'm the critic for Municipal Affairs.

First, before I start off my speech tonight I'd like to congratulate Shayne and Amy Meade, the newest married couple in Newfoundland and Labrador. I performed the ceremony at 6:30 p.m. on Middle Cove beach where they just got married. I'd like to congratulate them tonight.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: It's going to be a surprise for a lot of the members of the family, so I hope there are not a lot of them that are watching this tonight. I may ruin their surprise. I hope there are not a lot watching. I think I'm okay. I really do think I'm okay.

Mr. Speaker, that's a young couple that's starting off in life. I wish them all the best. Newfoundland is a great place to live and grow. They're in the best spot in the world as far as I'm concerned.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: When I look at the budget – this is, I don't know, how many times up now speaking on the budget. Our leader asked me to be a critic for certain departments. Two departments that really touched home with me was the fishery – because I do have allegiance with the fishery. I grew up in it and my family's involved in it. We're still involved in it.

Municipal Affairs was important to me also because being a former mayor – I can remember the late Jack Byrne called me one day. The municipal election was coming. Him and my father – I wanted to run to be a councillor, the two of them wanted me to run to be the mayor. I argued, and guess who won? The two of them

decided afterwards and I ran to be the mayor. That's how I became the mayor of Flatrock was because of the late Jack Byrne, the Member that preceded me before I came here. He was a great Member and a great man in the district. He was a good friend, too. He got me into municipal politics.

The one thing I'll say to every municipal leader out there, everyone that's involved in council – and I know there are lots of Members here, there are former mayors here in the House of Assembly with us now and people who ran. It's unbelievable the satisfaction you get from doing things right in your own community. It's hard; it's not easy. It's a hard thing to do.

Municipal leaders, the decisions they make are so close to home because the decisions they make are involved with their neighbours. To be a volunteer and have to make a decision whether they're going to be able to let them build a shed or build a house or put a road in, and you're dealing with your neighbour. It's hard because that's your neighbour and sometimes you'll disagree.

I'll always remember the first decision I made. It was a friend of mine and we argued whether a road had to be paved in a subdivision or not. Anyway, I won. It got paved, but it was difficult. We really got to applaud our municipalities in this province because for the most part they're volunteers. They put so much time and effort into it.

If you look at small communities, like I do in my area, you'll see the people on the council are also involved in everything else, from minor hockey to Girl Guides to everything else that's in that small community because they're the true leaders of the whole community. I really applaud the municipal leaders who are in.

I'm very happy – I said it in Estimates, and the Member for Lab West said to me after how good it was for Municipal Affairs. There are a lot of good things that happened within Municipal Affairs. I'm very pleased to see they have the 90-10, that didn't get cut, and the 70-30 and the 80-20, because it's important to the small towns.

Again, going back to my days as mayor of Flatrock, we were looking to get a fire truck. At

that time there were seven applications in. I said this before, but back then it was 50-50 funding. None of the small municipalities could afford it. To go out and tell a municipality, listen, \$125,000 of our budget is going to go towards paying for 50 per cent of a fire truck. They couldn't afford to do it.

This change we did over the last couple of years, it's great. It's fantastic what we did for the small towns. Then the mid-size towns, if you look at towns that were over 3,000, they are on the 80-20 split, which again is very – and it makes sense, they got more revenue coming in – and 70-30 for the larger towns. So it was a great thing and I'm glad that you kept that ratio there.

Also, last year another thing we put in was the sustainability plan for municipalities to give them some extra money. It was an extra \$22 million, and that stayed the same the year. Our operating grants, I understand they stayed basically the same, too, for the towns. So it's huge. That's great, because you know what? I said it here – so many times I said it here.

When you download things to municipalities or you download from us down to them, at the end of the day there's only one person that's going to pay. We only got one taxpayer in our communities, and that's what we got in small communities. No matter if they give it to the provincial government or to the municipal government, there's still one person who got to pay those taxes. I was pretty pleased with that, but I talked to the municipal leaders in my area and those are the good things.

Before the budget came down there was nothing good in the budget. The Minister of Finance said there was absolutely nothing good in this budget. It was a bad budget, and there was nothing good in the budget. Well, I just gave you three things that were good in the budget, okay. So it wasn't all bad. That's a good thing. I know you're agreeing with me.

In the budget, you've got to understand with municipalities, they have small budgets and they got to be balanced. At the end of the day, they can't run deficits, they can't run surpluses. At the end of the day, they've got to be able to balance the sheets. They got to know this is the

number of dollars we're going to spend and this is what we got coming in. So it's got to balance.

The difficulty that municipalities – and I asked a question on this the other day to the minister. The difficulty they're concerned with and they're really concerned with – and if you look at the release at their symposium they had out in Gander last weekend it was very clear how concerned they are, because the added taxes and fuel costs, for example.

I know the Member for Topsail said that CBS, I thought, told him that because of what's happening in this budget – it's \$250,000, or was it \$300,000?

MR. P. DAVIS: Three hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

MR. K. PARSONS: It's \$350,000 extra that it's going to cost that town. So you've got to understand where they're coming from. While the 90-10, the 70-30 and those things are great, that town did their budget last year. So they got their budget all ready for this year. Once the 16 cents comes in on a litre of gas, they've got to figure out, okay, what are we going to do? What services are we going to cut in order to be able to pay for our gas bill? Because they can't run a deficit. Insurance costs, where are they going to get the money for insurance costs?

The biggest thing, when they really got looking at things – the Minister of Municipal Affairs, again he got up and I asked him a question on the libraries. He said he never spoke to MNL about the libraries. I'll tell you, maybe he didn't but MNL are really concerned over that because that's the start. That's where they see a start of this downloading that they're fearful of. They really are. They're really scared, because what's going to happen is – I'll give you an example.

In my district, the Town of Pouch Cove, they have a wonderful library down there. The usage is over the top. The town itself in the last two years invested an extra \$8,000. They put in their budget, the last two years, \$8,000 to run an after-school program because there was that much interest there. The libraries board gave them so many hours to operate their library and they did that from in the morning. After school

the library was closed, but there was an interest in an after-school program.

Council voted on it and they all voted to take money out of their budget to be able to use this after-school program. This is what they do for their – there's no rent going into the library. The library is in the building, so they don't have to pay anything for the building. The light bill in the library is paid by the town and the town pays for the cleaning of the place and everything else. There is no snow clearing. The town takes care of all the snow clearing. So the librarian is basically the cost of what it is for the library.

Now we're going to tell that town that's after doing its part, as far as I'm concerned, really after doing its part, that now they have to come up – if they want to keep the library in their town, if you want a library in that town, then they have to come up with the money to pay for the librarian. I believe they are really doing their part.

I think we really have to look and see how important libraries are to small communities like Pouch Cove. There are a lot of people who go to the library that use it for the Internet. They go and they do some research. There are a lot of children who use it. They go there and they study in the evenings.

There's some tutoring that's getting done. There are some kids helping other kids. Libraries are great resources in our community. There's a program there in the morning for the tots, reading to children. Those are services that we – especially in communities like Pouch Cove and all over the province where they don't have the big centres like we do here in St. John's and areas like that. It's an important part.

I know every one of you guys and ladies over there on the other side, small libraries that are getting cut in your areas are important to those communities. There's none of you who can get up and say, no, we didn't want that library, or there's no municipal leader who'll come in and say, listen, that library means nothing to us, we don't want it. We don't want that library, take it back. They're important because they're an important part of the community.

I don't believe we should be downloading to the volunteers in municipalities who are working hard. Most of them that are in municipal buildings, the town does their part, like I just named, the heat bill and different things like that. We can't be downloading this stuff to municipalities. If you read their release, they're wondering what's going to happen in October. If this is the start – is this what you're starting to do to us?

There are good things in the budget, like I said earlier. I named off three to start off – three good things in the budget. But there are a lot of things in this budget that's going to affect municipalities right across the province. It's going to make it harder for them to give the services that the people in their towns deserve: the snow clearing, the garbage collection and all the street lighting. They do a lot of small things in the area.

Even when you look at 50-plus clubs – and I read a thing last night about 50-plus clubs and how concerned they are about the budgets. Our town councils are key to keeping our communities together.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. K. PARSONS: Go ahead. Say what you have to say there.

AN HON. MEMBER: We call them (inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. K. PARSONS: Okay. I don't understand what he's saying anyway. It doesn't make any difference. It didn't make any sense anyway.

I'm trying to talk about small towns like you have on the Northern Peninsula, how important their town councils are and why we should be supporting their town councils. That's what I'm talking about.

I'm talking about how many libraries you are losing in your district. It's zero. You're happy; you have a smile on your face. Talk to the fellow from Catalina that's losing his, talk to people

that are losing their libraries. You're happy that you got zero. Talk about all of them because we're not happy about losing libraries. Communities are not happy. Town councils are not happy.

Mr. Speaker, I'm here tonight talking about municipalities in this province. I'm talking about how important they are to the people of the province, how important they are to the constituents, what they do for small towns, what they do for large towns. They're volunteers. They're people that come out and give freely of their time. In some cases, they do over and above everything.

They'll be out doing maintenance. Go to a Santa Claus parade in a small community and see, probably, who the Santa Claus is. It's probably the mayor. It could be the deputy mayor. But you can mark it down that they're there and they're involved. Go see who is running the Girl Guides; go see who's running minor hockey. They're volunteers. They're the heart and soul of Newfoundland and Labrador, and we have lots of them out there. We have to support them.

While this budget did a few good things, they're scared and they're nervous and they're afraid of what's going to happen in future budgets coming down the road in the fall. What else is going to be cut? What else is going to be downloaded? You may think the libraries are a small, little thing, but they're afraid that it's just the start – the added cost of gas.

They're human, too, because I guarantee you they're the ones that are emailing you. They're the ones that every time you go to one of your functions that are talking to you and saying what effect this budget is having on their towns, what effect it's having on their neighbours, what effect it's having on the seniors, what effect it's having on people who are on fixed income in these small communities.

That's who is talking to you; I know they're talking to you because they tell me. They're talking about effects that this budget is having on normal Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, on hard-working Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, our seniors. This is the effect it's going to have. As you download services and make the towns' costs go up, they're the ones

going to be paying the taxes there too and they're afraid of that.

Mr. Speaker, I wanted to just touch base today – I heard lots of speakers here today and it was interesting to listen to them all. The Minister of Health said we spent like drunken sailors. Well, I'd like to ask the Minister of Health to go to the Town of Gander and ask them about all of the investments that were done in there in the last 10 or 12 years and if they considered the fire departments, water treatment and everything else that was in the Town of Gander spending like drunken sailors, because that's not what happened.

Let me tell you, when you look at this budget today, you guys are going to spend more money than we spent last year. You're spending more money. You talk out of both sides of your face because one time you got up and you talked about how we're spending like drunken sailors, yet your investments in towns, roads and everything else, the same as we did – we invested in communities. We invested in communities in the roads, infrastructure in the communities. We invested in building town halls, more fire trucks than you could ever imagine in this province –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. K. PARSONS: Yes, but do you know what? That's a good thing.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Part of the reason we ask those who are identified to speak to address their comments to the Speaker is so not to engage other Members directly in debate. I'll ask the Member to address the Speaker with the comments and not directly engage other Members in debate, and I'll ask Members opposite to respect the Member that's been identified to speak.

The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

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

I'll address you now because I don't want to get that crowd going again.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, we've done a lot over the last – I'm going to talk about small communities right around this province. We've invested – like I said to you earlier about the fire truck for the Town of Flatrock where it was 50-50 and now it's 90-10. Now there are about 30 applications in for fire trucks. That's because of smart investments we made in small communities right across this province.

The Department of Municipal Affairs, there are some great people in that department, running that department. They do great work; they're on the ground – listen, we still have a lot of issues in this province. We've got a lot of issues when it comes to water, we've got a lot of issues when it comes to waste water, and it's going to take investments. There's no doubt about it. I hope that you do invest in Municipal Affairs and I hope you do invest in the towns in our province. It's important that we do. Like I said, the people that are running our communities, our mayors and councillors, are the heart and soul of all our communities and we deserve to be able to be there to support them.

Mr. Speaker, the biggest thing that people in this province want is to be able to have some hope. Today I listened to a lot of speakers get up – there were four of them got up in a row – and I don't think either one of them had anything they could say to somebody, hope that there's a positive – everything was just so negative, and it was doom, gloom, doom, gloom.

The reason why that is – and we asked the questions here today in the House of Assembly. They don't have a plan. They've got no plan. The only plan they've got is to tax, tax, tax, tax and cut, cut, cut. Today I think there were probably about five questions asked to the Premier of this province. What is the plan you have for the future of Newfoundland and Labrador? Each time he got up he blamed us. It is our fault that he doesn't have a plan. We hear it day after day, they get up, you don't understand. Well, the people of the province do understand. They do understand. If you talk to them, they'll tell you. I understand they've got no plan.

One of the Members said today – I'm not sure which one – something about lazy. I heard a lot of people, Mr. Speaker, describe this budget as a

lazy budget – a very lazy budget. They went and they took every line and said, okay, we're cutting there, we're cutting there, we're cutting there. That's all they did. We're taxing here, we're taxing there, we're taxing there. Where was the plan? What are we going to do in the future? Where's their plan? They have no plan. And that's the whole problem; they never had a plan coming in.

They were about a week before election day before they hauled their book out and tried to say that we have a plan now. I think it was a week before the election. The day before the advance poll they came out with a plan, and then we heard what the comments were on that. There were really scary comments on that. People looked at it and thought it was a joke. I guess now it's no joke because we saw the results.

I've got one minute left and I really want to just say that this budget really does affect the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. I listened to everyone over there today. I listened to the Member for Harbour Main, and I really felt heartfelt for her because she knows. She has listened to it in her district. She's hearing it every day. It's hard to go back to your districts and do what you have to do. It's hard to be able to talk to people and take what it is, but let me tell you, those people do understand.

What's happening in this budget is an attack on people who are hard-working Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and there's no need of it. There's no need to do what you're doing. There are better ways to do what you're doing. If you had a plan in the first place, it would be a better way to do it, but what's happening here is low-income, middle-income and hard-working seniors and people who are on fixed income are paying the price of what you're doing over there today.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. WARR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As always, it's a pleasure to rise in this hon. House and have an opportunity to speak to Concurrence. I, too, like my hon. colleague, would like to speak to municipalities in my district and speak a little bit about what I've been hearing throughout this budget process, this budget debate as well.

Before I do it, I want to say how much of an honour it is for me to again rise and represent the good folks of Baie Verte – Green Bay. It's a fabulous district. In my first address to the budget, I was reminded by my colleague opposite about the – he has respect for MHAs who operate in larger districts. My district is one of those districts, Mr. Speaker.

We were formerly the district known as Baie Verte – Springdale. We're very happy to have the fine people of Green Bay South join us in the new District of Baie Verte – Green Bay. Mr. Speaker, 42 districts representing a wide range, and certainly hard-working and industrial people. I'll get to that in my notes, but I want to say it's been a pleasure in the first five or six months here in the House of Assembly to represent these fine people.

Before I forget it, Mr. Speaker, the last time I rose I had the opportunity of recognizing nurses' week and I got a good pat on the back for doing that. So today I want to recognize National Police Week.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. WARR: Mr. Speaker, I look around this House of Assembly and I see my good friend up in the Chamber, and I see my good friend the Sergeant-at-Arms, and I see my good friend the former premier of the province, who were police officers like myself in the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary. I just want to take the opportunity to wish all my friends on both sides of the police forces that we have in Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker, both of them with the prefix royal. I think my hon. colleague mentioned that in one of his speaks.

I think there are only four or five police forces in the world with the prefix royal and we have two of them here in Canada, Mr. Speaker. The Royal

Newfoundland Constabulary and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and I'm pretty proud of that.

AN HON. MEMBER: There are seven of them.

MR. WARR: What's that, seven? Seven. Thank you.

So I'm pretty proud of that, Mr. Speaker.

I just want to talk about the first time I had an opportunity to address the House, Mr. Speaker, I talked about two things that my grandfather used to say, and that was never put off for tomorrow what you can get done today, and look after the pennies and the dollars will look after themselves. I want to add one more to that tonight, Mr. Speaker, and that's waste not, want not.

Mr. Speaker, I've never been in the blame game. I say things for what I mean. If I come across as blaming people or a group of people, that's not my style. I'm not in the blame game. I think we own this. As Newfoundlanders and Labradorians we own this collectively. We have an issue, let's fix it.

Budgets, Mr. Speaker, are about choices. We have one of two choices, as far as I see it. We either choose to remain status quo or we choose to do the job we were elected to do, and that's to operate this fine province that we all live in.

The hon. Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi, in one of her talks, asked about what values did we base our budget on. I think that was a question the hon. Member asked. Well, I'm going to take the opportunity to answer that, Mr. Speaker. We based our budget on honesty, responsibility, accountability, good sound management and concern for the well-being of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. WARR: I just want to go back to another comment that was thrown from across the House, Mr. Speaker. I can't remember, and it doesn't really make a difference about who said the comment, but the comment was with regard to the budget. I took great exception with the

Members opposite who made a comment that we made mean-spirited decisions when we chose to release this budget. I don't think they're mean-spirited decisions whatsoever. I think they're good, sound decisions. There's nobody has any more empathy for the people who will find themselves with difficult times.

We all see this budget as a difficult budget, but I was given the opportunity – contrary to what was written on my Facebook last week, I ran on my ability to manage. That's what I ran on. I ran on my history, and I ran on the fact that I've lived all my life with budgets.

Like the hon. the Minister of Natural Resources mentioned today about the team we have here. She talked about boards and commissions, and people on this side and on the other side as well. We've got a great group of people in this House of Assembly.

I, too, Mr. Speaker, had the opportunity to lead. I sat as chairman of the board of directors of the Canadian Regional Hardware Association. I sat as chairman of the board of the Castle Building Centres, which was a national board. I sat as chairman of the board of Atlantic Building Supply Dealers Association. So, Mr. Speaker, budgets are not new to me.

I spent the last 28 years operating a family business. Budgets are not new to me. We've had some pretty trying times over the years as well, but do you know what. The hard work and the dedication to steering the ship in the right direction, the dedication that we had paid off certainly in the end.

I want to talk about my hon. colleague, the Member who just spoke from Cape St. Francis – talked about the fact that they spent a fair amount of provincial investment in all of our communities, and yes they have. They did, Mr. Speaker. That same Member made a comment – I think it was the Member made a comment – that what we were doing as a collective body here with this particular budget that we had brought down, his comment was too much, too fast. I say to my hon. Member, with respect, that works both ways because we spent too much too fast as well. I just wanted to make that comment and I make it with the utmost respect, Mr. Speaker.

The other thing that was said was we've never seen anything like this before – the hon. Member said. That's because we've never been in this financial mess, not to this extent, Mr. Speaker. We've got to work our way out of it. I would suggest that we're on the right track.

Mr. Speaker, while I'm missing my good friend from Labrador this evening –

AN HON. MEMBER: Torngat.

MR. WARR: – the hon. Member for Torngat Mountains, I want to talk a little bit to the Member for St. John's Centre who made a comment today with regard to Kevin Major, a well-known writer. He talked about the fact that he's ashamed in this province, Mr. Speaker. I take great exception –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. WARR: Pardon?

AN HON. MEMBER: He was ashamed of (inaudible).

MR. WARR: He was ashamed of being a Newfoundlander. What was the comment?

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. WARR: Never mind, Mr. Speaker.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, there was a comment and ashamed was in the comment.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. WARR: I took great exception to it anyway, when you talk about this great Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity, when I was home a couple of weeks ago, to see a CBC newscast called *Because News* with Gavin Crawford. You would all know Gavin Crawford. The headline says: "It's brutal news: Rick Mercer on Newfoundland library cuts."

Mr. Speaker, back on December 6, 2001, there was an amendment made to the Constitution of

Canada. That amendment included our good friends in Labrador. I took great exception to what was written here.

Mr. Speaker, Labrador gave a part of my family in Happy Valley-Goose Bay an opportunity many, many years ago. Those people are still there today and certainly been very, very successful business operators in Labrador. Labrador gave my daughter, when she graduated from Memorial University, in Natuashish her first job. I take great exception with Rick Mercer, who we all have the utmost respect for. I mean Rick Mercer is a great Newfoundlander and Labradorian.

Mr. Speaker, when I look at this, "When news broke that over half of Newfoundland's libraries ... no panellist was more upset than Newfoundland's favorite son ... Continuing Newfoundland's war ... This is killing me as a Newfoundlander ... If you want to destroy rural Newfoundland ..." And the list goes on. "Estimates are the average Newfoundland family ... News is making an effort to keep Newfoundland reading ... We want you to take a work of fiction and add some Newfoundland to it."

What happened to Labrador, Mr. Speaker? What happened to Labrador in this news article? I'm appalled that Rick Mercer, given the type of person Rick Mercer is – I know deep down Rick Mercer is a true Newfoundland and Labradorian but he didn't prove it in this document, Mr. Speaker, and I take great exception that he never included our Labrador friends when he addresses us as a province.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to – before I do that, I want to turn to, because I was surprised that this article didn't come up in this House of Assembly. It was written by Paul Lambe. Paul Lambe is from here in St. John's. The article was saying: "To those thinking of leaving N.L." I just wanted to highlight some remarks in his letter.

His first was, "I encourage young people to take a break and wait for things to turn around ... It will not be long and things will get better, unlike what these 'bleakers' (those with only bleak outcomes) say. They find it too easy to complain.

“The situation is as it is because of a collective will and responsibility. Whether it’s you or some of your family or friends, or others you know, you have to take responsibility for all the past, the politicians that were elected, the policies in place, the waste that occurred. If you did not stop it, you were a part of it.”

I go back to my comments in the beginning, Mr. Speaker. That was a wonderful letter that I thought Paul addressed the province in the media. I thought it was well written and some really good commentary.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I’m referenced because I pride myself here in this House of Assembly of paying attention to what’s being said. My hon. colleague across talked tonight about being positive and I certainly agree with the Member, Mr. Speaker. I want to talk about some of the positive things that are happening in the good District of Baie Verte – Springdale.

First of all, we had a company in Springdale – Springdale Forest Resources; a great company under great management. Actually, they picked up the contracts for cutting the lines across Newfoundland, the Island portion of our province, for Nalcor and put a lot of people to work in my part of the district.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity last week to talk a gentleman in Triton. I won’t get into names, but I will tell you that the good news is the marine centre, which was one of the most premiere marine centres in Newfoundland and Labrador building fishing vessels, has recently reopened in Triton. It’s doing all kinds of refit work on vessels.

He just hired six new journeymen welders and just received his first contract, a 55-foot fishing vessel from Boston, Massachusetts. We want to talk about good news, let’s talk about the fine country of the USA bringing their work to my district, Mr. Speaker, for quality work.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. WARR: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, as we’re talking into boat building, I want to talk about three manufacturing facilities that we have in the district: Green Bay

Fibre in King’s Point, coastal marine in King’s Point and Atkinson & Yates in Springdale. I’ve had an opportunity to talk to three of those owners and I’m happy to stand here and report today that they have a full contingent of workers in their shops. You’re on a waiting list to get a boat built in these three manufacturing facilities right now. The business has never been any better. This is good news.

I want to talk about Modular Homes in La Scie. It’s probably one of the few modular home-building businesses on the Island, Mr. Speaker. Things continue to go well for them as well.

I want to talk about Duralite drills in Triton. Mr. Speaker, a manufacturer of drills – I’m just lost on the wording. Anyway, this company now is talking about shipping their drills as far away as South America. So there are good things happening in this province and there are good things happening in my neck of the woods.

My colleague, the hon. the Minister of Natural Resources, today talked about the good things in the mining sector that’s happening on the Baie Verte Peninsula with Rambler and Anaconda. I just want to remind everybody that the mining conference will be held in Baie Verte on the 3rd and 4th of June this year.

I want to talk about another comment that came across from the Member, and I agree with him. The comment was we’re just a small player in the fishery, so said the Member. I say that’s so unfortunate when we have the best product in the world off the waters of Newfoundland and Labrador. It’s so unfortunate.

Mr. Speaker, again, this is a tough budget, but I want to take the opportunity – all of our districts have been affected. I know the good Minister of Municipal Affairs is going to open the purse strings, hopefully sometime soon. I want to talk about things that are needed in my district. We have roadwork in Seal Cove and Wild Cove. We need roadwork in Coachman’s Cove. I want to talk about the La Scie highway.

The Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune mentioned in her speech that she has \$200 million worth of product coming up over her highway. Well, I say, Mr. Speaker, I have \$500 million coming up over the La Scie road. Even

though there was 10 kilometres done on that road last year, there are lots to be done.

We're talking about the brush cutting and roadwork in Westport. We're talking about the roadwork in Middle Arm, Burlington and Smith's Harbour. We're talking about the roadwork in King's Point and the community of Rattling Brook. We're talking about the roadwork to Little Bay and Beachside. We have issues with the water supply in Woodstock. The list goes on. Not to mention the health services in La Scie and Triton.

I can't leave without talking about the resettlement of Little Bay Islands. The people of Little Bay Islands have been waiting for an answer. I assured them last week that the minister is working on the resettlement policy.

Last but not least, Mr. Speaker, we're talking about pavement. I want to talk about the unpaved roads because I have three of them: Purbeck's Cove, Nippers Harbour and Snooks Arm road. We're talking about replacing pavement. These people have never seen pavement.

I see my time is up. I'll take the opportunity to thank you for your time. I look forward to the opportunity to rise again.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. PETTEN: – and speak on resources. The Labour Relations Agency falls under my critic roles, and I thank the Minister of Environment and Conservation and his staff – it was short, but I appreciated their input.

Mr. Speaker, I want to start off, I made a conscious effort, I said I'd like to try to speak to the facts about my district, how it affects my district when talking about the budget. Sometimes we get lost when talking about the big picture. I've got to commend the Member for Baie Verte – Green Bay. He spoke very passionately about his district for most of his speech. I've got a lot of respect for that.

As my colleague for Cape St. Francis gets up, I admire any Member in the House who gets up and speaks with passion on their district. I think there's a lot to be said for that. Those are the people who put them there, and it's refreshing sometimes to see they get up and they go back to their roots and the reason we're all here. I just wanted to commend them for doing that. I think it's very enjoyable to listen to. I've got to say, I sit down and enjoy any Member that gets up and speaks to the facts like that. As a matter of fact, that's something that I'm going to try to do, stick to the script here tonight, Mr. Speaker.

My district, CBS, as a lot of people may know, may not know, it's probably the second-largest municipality in the province. We're not sure on the numbers; I guess we'll find out with the census this year. It's quite a beautiful district that's been rapidly growing, expanding. As a matter of fact, I guess our growth outdid our infrastructure, is what happened, really, because the town just exploded and we never had the infrastructure to deal with the demands. A lot of young families, a lot of home-builds – we're averaging 200-250 a year for a number of years, which was rapid now. I know Paradise, my neighbouring – my colleague for Topsail – Paradise's district, that's taken off too.

When I hear Members opposite sometimes reference the spending, waste of money, and I suppose we've wasted a lot of money. I do take some exception to that, because my district in particular, it's almost 27,000 people, and I tell you there are not many of them people in that district would say any of the investments that were made by this government in that district were a waste of money.

We have a new arena. We have an outdoor soccer, AstroTurf field. We have a new Manuels River – beautiful facility, it's used by everybody, university programs there. It's a

first-class operation right on the Manuels River. It's world renowned, the Manuels River. And there are many other infrastructure – recently myself and the Minister of Municipal Affairs were up to the opening of the new fire hall and town.

This is a fast-growing town and all these things were needed. I don't think for a second any of those investments – and there are others – would I constitute a waste of money. You have a district that's servicing possibly in the vicinity of, I don't know, maybe – it's a service centre for, I'd say off the cuff, maybe 50,000-plus, 60,000 people which brings me to a point.

During the government's budget consultations, there was one I attended at the Manuels River Centre. It was hosted by the Minister of Education. There was a good turnout. Every table in that room talked about the need for regionalization. There's no better example when you look at the metro area, moving outside the city, of an area that can foster in the regionalization. You look at the surrounding communities which brings me to another point, actually.

I listened to the Member for Harbour Main, this evening, speak on the budget. I want to commend her. She did a great job. It's never easy getting up in the House, as I'm learning. I keep saying if I keep practising, I'll eventually make it perfect. The more I stand up, I get more comfortable.

I want to commend her, and this is not meant to be a slight because myself and the Member for Harbour Main do get along great. I have a lot of respect for her. I'll say it because I've lived in CBS all my life; she has quite a beautiful district. I was kind of wishing that she would talk more about her district. I kept saying you should talk about your district.

She has one of the most beautiful districts in the province arguably, a lot of activity. It's a rapidly growing town. The Marine Institute has a first-class facility up there. We have the Historic Sites in Cupids; you have the squid-jigging grounds. It's just quite a beautiful town.

I just wanted to put that in because it's a neighbouring district of mine. As a matter of

fact, there was a time, up until 2007, that my district used to take in Holyrood up to the North Arm Bridge. I have a lot of family, actually, in the Member's district so I know that area quite well. Actually, I have a lot of family in her district.

I just wanted to highlight that. I do have a lot of respect for the Member and she did a great job, but I just wanted to point out about her district because I think she does have quite a beautiful district.

Mr. Speaker, as my colleague for Cape St. Francis pointed out, this budget – the Minister of Finance stated there was nothing good in the budget and that was her prerogative. I do agree that there were a lot of good programs, existing programs that are still in the budget that were brought in by this former government. He's highlighted some and I highlighted some investments, but some of the hard-core areas – like the Town of CBS, the town themselves are looking at an increase in cost when you look at insurance, gas for their vehicles and whatnot. They're looking at a \$350,000 increase.

In the recent municipal budget in CBS there was a lot of controversy because they actually increased property taxes. They stopped the seniors' discount, and there were other unpopular decisions, fees and stuff like that. There was a lot of public outcry in my district over it. Their words were they cut a fine line to get their budget balanced. Now they're faced with this extra burden of \$350,000. That's an approximate figure, Mr. Speaker, it may go higher. When you look at the budget implications, that's not a big town.

We know the City of St. John's obviously is facing a bigger burden, and we know what just happened in recent months out in the city with their budget. You have a problem. There's a download on municipalities, as my colleague stated. Those towns and cities already have their budgets done. Under legislation, they have to be balanced budgets. Now they're faced with this extra burden. So where does that go?

Unfortunately, it's going to go on the taxpayer. It's going to go on the people, the residents of the province who are every day – I mean every day and every hour of the day – crying out.

Because of this existing budget, they don't know how they're going to do it.

It's a two-pronged approach, because the provincial budget is coming at them with all the tax increases, the levies and you name it. Then, indirectly, it's coming at the municipalities. Now they have to kind of tighten their belts on the town. So you're getting it coming from your provincial and your municipal level. That's pretty tough on a lot of families.

As I speak of the budget – like I say, this is coming from a resident in my district. I've had this in front of me now for a couple of weeks actually. It was on April 18 I got the email. It was a paragraph she wrote that really hit, when I read it, I circled it. I have a lot of emails that I can – I have more than that, that's just a few I printed off. There was one there that I was –

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

MR. PETTEN: There was one comment, and I'll just take a paragraph. It hit home, and I'm sure Members opposite probably can appreciate it.

She says: I'm a mom, a wife, a manager of a retail chain. My husband works slightly above minimum wage, full-time job. I'm a breadwinner – and trust me, when I say bread it's not plentiful. This budget scares me. We live penny to penny. I already removed \$70 extra tax from each pay so that I have that lump at the end of the year to put towards unexpected bills we accumulate through the year. I have lived here for eight years and I've never been able to afford to leave this Island. Why is this allowed? Why must we pay a membership to live here? Are welfare receivers looked up legitimately? Are people who avoid taxes being addressed? Are cash jobs being ditched? Unemployment –?

Do you see the frustration of this lady? It's a lash out at people who are struggling. It just shows the anger; a budget that's almost pitting one group against another. She's just screaming out.

When you read in the context, this is a real person. There's no one in this House can deny this person is struggling and they don't know

how they're going to make it. So with the download on municipalities, as I said, and the provincial budget, it's going to be very tough for those people to survive.

To my district again, as I say, I have 13 personal care homes in the boundaries of my district. They provide a great service. As we know, long-term care beds – we have a shortage. Those personal care homes have been around a long time. I've been in every one of them. I know a lot of the owners, actually. They work very hard and provide a great home for those individuals. They're some of the more unfortunate people. They're given a good life but they struggle. I know personally, and some of them are very sad stories, but they are quite happy. The surroundings those home owners have provided them is quite pleasant actually.

In saying that, Mr. Speaker, I have gotten calls from numerous owners in my district and their concerns are very well founded. As a result of the budget cuts on over-the-counter drugs – we have residents who are getting \$150 a month. They have to pay if they need winter boots, a winter coat and other things. That's their coffee money if they go to the store, whatever. That's their pocket money for a month. You take that in 30 days; it's not a lot of money, \$5 a day.

If they need Aspirin or if they need – apparently alcohol swabs won't be covered because there's a better way of doing it. I'm not opposed to that. I'm waiting on some information from the parliamentary secretary to Health. I'm having trouble with some of the names of the districts, Mr. Speaker.

AN HON. MEMBER: Virginia Waters – Pleasantville.

MR. PETTEN: Virginia Waters – Pleasantville. Thank you very much.

Those personal care homes are calling and saying, these people with \$150 a month, we don't know where they're coming up with money to pay for those needs they have. Whether that be Tylenol, an Aspirin, like I said, a cotton swab. I don't know, maybe vitamins. People take these medications for whatever purposes. It could be, I don't know. I'm not a

person who takes vitamins but for those residents, it becomes part of their life.

If you go in those homes, they know their medications better than anyone working there or anyone. They look for certain things. They need them, they want them. Whether they need them or not, they believe they need them. It's part of their life. So now you're going to say if you need this, you're only going to have this much money a month, which is pretty well nothing. That's the stuff that really hits the core.

I'd like to also tie that together with seniors. I speak with seniors a lot because I do have a lot of seniors in my district. When you go and knock on doors during an election you realize just how many retirees and seniors are in your district.

One thing stuck out to me during my time knocking on doors, Mr. Speaker. I saw a lot of struggling seniors. I've had the fortune of being able to assist a lot of them and help them with different programs and avail of different things. It has worked out good, even with the municipal government. I found that really enjoyable. I enjoy helping. I enjoy doing what I can because it's not a matter of me being special it's just directing them in the right way. They don't know where to find the services in government.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER (Lane): Order, please!

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

They don't know where to find the proper services within government. So you just lead them to the right program and they've been very appreciative.

Those same seniors have made references to me in the last number of weeks. With this added burden, they don't how they're going to make it. I know first-hand because I dealt with a lot of them on different applications, different things. I wonder how they're going to make it, too, Mr. Speaker.

Seniors in my district – I have a lot of seniors. I don't know if there's a Member in this House who don't have a lot of seniors in their district.

This is not party stripe stuff; this is the bread and butter. This is the main – again, I always come up and I don't play on words when I say this. I try to be as genuine and sincere as possible. I try to speak from the heart. We get back in our tangents back and forth but ultimately, Mr. Speaker, I was elected by the people in my District of CBS. I told them I'd represent them. I told them I'd be their voice and that's what I try to do every day in this House.

The Minister of Health said today the definition of insanity. I use it a lot in my terminology sometimes, too. Sometimes I wonder, you're getting up here and you do the same thing over and over again expecting a different result. I feel like that some days here because you keep trying to put personal stories – we can talk about pie in the sky stuff and the stuff that doesn't really matter to people –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Speaker reminds all hon. Members I that I realize you have very, very pressing conversations but if you could have them outside, if you must.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I try to put it as personal as possible because hon. Members opposite have the same people in their districts – we all do. We all have the same concerns whether they are more or not. Be sincere, listen to what people have to tell you, try to advocate on their behalf.

Mr. Speaker, most Members in this House, every day outside of whatever we do in this House I think, ultimately, our role is trying to help the people in your district, trying to help people in the province. Ministers try to help and do what's best in their portfolios. It's what we're all supposed to be doing here. But if we do that in isolation of what people are telling us, the people on the street, whether it's emails or phone calls, when you run in to a coffee store – there is not a place in my district I go and this conversation don't chime up.

I don't think a lot of people are really going – they're upset and they're nervous. There's a lot of concern. All I can tell them, as a Member, is that we'll bring your concerns forward. We all individually get up here and we all speak sometimes in generalities and whatnot, but we're always talking about the same thing: It's about the people. I don't say that lightly because I really, truly believe it. Without the people, none of us would be here today. I keep saying that over again because it is true.

We all ran on a platform that what we were going to do was the best for our district. I won't even go there, but I do understand some of the – on that side of the House. I understand politics. That's something that they will deal with and I wish them well. From my end of it, and really when we stand up here, all of the Members, the Third Party included, they get up and they speak passionately about their district or they speak passionately about issues and they should be listened to. I think it should be given some more credence because those are real people. That's what we're all elected to represent. They have real concerns.

When I read out that email – anyone is welcome to it; I'll keep the lady's name – I've had emails: I'm crying as I write this email. I have no doubt they are. How do you respond to that? I write back and say I feel sorry for you. I never get into the bashing of the government. Actually, some Members opposite, I've cc'd the Premier on emails. I made that clear in my email. This is not about picking sides. I understand where you're coming from. I support your cause but, ultimately, it's the government's decision. It's heart wrenching, but it's real.

Maybe that's the sober thought everyone in this House needs to have. You have a budget that's arguably one of the toughest budgets we've faced. Getting up every day and blaming the former administration – that plays well in some avenues. Fill your boots; I guess that's their prerogative. I can't control what someone else says. But that's starting not to wash in the public. The public are, kind of, come on, will you get on with it. What's your answer to the question, what are your issues?

I have schools in my district – teachers, parents, principals: they're all concerned about the

multigrades, the Intensive Core French and the class size, but nobody is listening to them. I'm one person. Yes, I come in and I sit and stand in this House as one of 40. I'm one person. I tell them every day and I try to do my best. If I'm not speaking individually to one of the Members opposite or ministers, I'm here stood on my feet or I'm emailing or phone calling.

I'm one of 40. Actually, there are seven here, of 40, and two there. There are nine of 40 that I think are doing what they can to represent their districts. It's not a finger-pointing thing across the way; there are good people over there. Like most Members, we're all in this for the same reason.

I see emails that come in to all sides of this House. Some of them are pretty desperate and some of them are not responded to. I think we can park the budget for a second and if you look at the realistic view, the realistic point, all the rest of it is smoke and mirrors. It's about the people. Until we all take that sober second thought – people are not protesting, people are not having these meetings; people are not emailing hundreds of emails per day for something to do.

People are very concerned, Mr. Speaker. I really and truly, from the bottom of my heart, wish people would listen – the government would listen to those people.

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, Mr. Speaker.

I guess staying on the social theme – this is my third time speaking to the budget. On the theme of Concurrence, I was just asking my colleague exactly the nature of what I should be talking about. So I'm going to pick up from my critic from across the way and the idea of social themes, the presentation that we made together with the Labour Relations Agency, Francophone

Affairs and then we'll go through the next 20 minutes or so on social themes.

In staying with the social theme, if I may I'd like to just take a personal second and apologize to my father- and mother-in-law. I mentioned them in my maiden speech. I thought we had an hour and a half and we did have an hour and a half for a break. I thought it would be sufficient.

Anyway, my wife just picked me up and we went back over to their place. They used to run Hong's takeout. He was cooking up a big storm and at about 10 minutes to seven, I realized I had to go. So they've got a great scoff going over there and I'm back here with all you fine folks.

Anyway, I'm back here, and the chicken was great. I had a chicken leg that was great. Anyway, if he's listening, they're listening, I apologize to Mr. and Mrs. Hong.

AN HON. MEMBER: They're eating your food (inaudible).

MR. TRIMPER: That's right.

Staying on the theme of social affairs – we don't get to talk about them too much, but I did want to just have a little mention, take a couple of minutes to talk about the Labour Relations Agency – an extremely important organization. I must say, it's not a lot of people in there, but a very impressive calibre of folks that are there. They've got an interesting record running – I'm not sure how long it's going to last this year, but certainly for the last year, and I estimate we're probably on about month 15 now, we have not had a legal lockout or strike in this province.

I would give a lot of the credit to the people around Mr. Geoff Williams and his team. I get a regular report from these guys, and each Friday I get a summary of what's going on in the province. There is a lot of tension, there's a lot of challenge, but when you have good people calming things down at the table and getting people to work together, I must say it's just a joy and a pleasure to work with a good calibre group of folks like that.

Another great group that we don't get to speak a lot about, but is going to enjoy tremendous profile here in the province in just about one month from now is the Office of French

Services. That's the Francophone Affairs Department. I'm lucky enough to speak some French and can carry on with these guys. Jim Prowse and his team run that operation.

In about one month from now on the 22nd and 23rd this province will be hosting the Canadian Francophonie, so all of the territorial, provincial and federal ministers responsible for French Services will be in our fair city. Yours truly and the federal minister, Joly, will be hosting a day and a half examining how this province and how the rest of the country can do what we can to fulfill obligations regarding the francophones of this country.

We have, for example, in Newfoundland and Labrador about 3,100 people who identify themselves as mother-tongue French, and frankly that is my responsibility to make their life as smooth as possible and provide them an opportunity to enjoy and live in this great province in their own language.

Staying on the social themes, what I wanted to go to is just talk about how we made some priorities and choices. Certainly the Finance Minister and President of Treasury Board has talked at length about the efforts we took around the Cabinet table to ensure the most vulnerable in our society were protected. The last thing on anybody's mind, whether it be in Cabinet, in caucus, or I'm sure, in this House, wanted to do was to have the most vulnerable folks pushed to a point of being even more vulnerable. That was so not our mission. I'm very pleased to say that after a lot of hard work we managed to accomplish that with initiatives, and we've spoken about them at length – I've spoken about them at length – the enhanced Seniors' Benefit and our signature piece in the budget, that \$75 million, \$76 million that we took and created into a Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement, specifically targeted at those most vulnerable and making sure that they were protected.

Switching over and staying with the vulnerable, I also wanted to make a little comment because I've been subjected to a series of interviews just in the last week and a half regarding the cancellation of a job-owned program that's been going for years in the Department of Environment and Conservation. I wanted to

comment on it because we felt, and I felt, in Environment and Conservation back in January when we were tasked with this need to see what we can do to contribute to the resolution, to the solution that we needed to come up with in our budget, we had to look at, okay, what's most vulnerable in terms of the scope and mandate of Environment and Conservation, and what can we do to contribute again to the solution.

So core programs such as endangered wildlife populations, drinking water quality, protected areas, wise decision making around the environmental assessment process, these are some examples of some of the key things that we wanted to preserve and, in fact, enhance in our program.

Strategies and techniques and so on were in a particular package in Environment and Conservation. There was some \$300,000 worth of savings amongst a variety of initiatives; some of which included a program that's been going on for years. One involved a collection of coyote carcasses that's been going on – I indicated in a response to some questions the other day – and people have a lot of perceptions, I would suggest, about this animal – it is a predator that is here to stay.

We have been paying \$25 a carcass for the last many years and in the rate of collecting some 1,000, 1,100 carcasses a year, we are actually bringing in thousands and thousands of carcasses. We do examine them. We have been examining them. I would suggest that the point of collecting more data around what is happening with coyotes is well passed.

So some of these decisions, while people may, on the outlook, say why are you doing that and how come you're pulling this back, now what's that going to mean, we're going to have coyotes in the street, in fact, we've collected a great deal of information. We understand a lot about this animal and that's just part of the wise decision making that we're implementing in this province now to catch up, frankly, with the rest of the country.

Another one that's out there is in jawbone collections. I've think I've done four interviews so far. I have two more tomorrow, one of which is with *The Wall Street Journal*, of all places. So

it is getting a bit of attention. I look forward to talking to those guys about moose and jawbones, but I just wanted to put a few thoughts out there because people are saying what a travesty this is that we've scrubbed this program.

As I said, we have already collected a substantial amount of information. Jawbones were collected to provide an age as to the animals that hunters select when they're in the field. So there is a bit of bias there. Also, they have been used in some research applications in terms of measurements. We're talking measurements of millimetres, thereabouts, as an indication – it has been suggested – of the quality of the habitat that these animals occupy.

I would suggest to anyone who's listening – I'm sure I'm holding everybody fascinated here – that why not just study the landscape itself as opposed to trying to say, well, let's measure a jawbone and if it's getting bigger or smaller, maybe that might infer what's going on in the habitat. I would suggest that perhaps a more appropriate way to do this is to just go out and understand what's going on with the landscape.

In fact, that's what the Wildlife Division and Parks and Natural Areas Division have been doing and we're shifting more and more in that direction. I look very forward to seeing some great insight coming forward as a result of frankly using a lot of the information we've already collected, but using it in a wise way, with a lot of the computer modelling techniques that are out there and available.

There is a theme here running through my presentation: staying on social issues. Like many of us do here, we check up on what's going on outside of this amazing room. I just decided to cast on to Facebook. Well, what a sobering thing that is to do sometimes. I've decided I'm just going to let people fly on my Facebook site. I've decided I'm not going to block, so there's quite a litany of goodies in there; some complimentary, some not so complimentary. But anyway if people want to vent, let them vent away. One thing I've said – this is my third time speaking to this budget – is that if everything that was being accused of us was true, I think I would be holding my head in shame. But I'm very pleased to say there is a lot of good news in

this budget and there is a lot of good, wise thinking in how the decisions were made.

I feel that's always important to talk about, so here I go with my third kick at this. I wanted to reach back to Labrador because I just saw some postings about how little money was being spent on highways up there and so on. On one hand I understand where the venting and the frustrations are coming from because, boy, we're just hacking paths and roads out of pure wilderness. In many cases, as my comrade from Baie Verte, the Member for Baie Verte – Green Bay – which by the way we were just talking about what an oxymoron that is, Baie Verte – Green Bay. It's like Baie Verte – Baie Verte, but anyway. He made a comment that folks hadn't seen pavement. Well, we haven't even seen a road in many locations, so we're happy to see progress.

I was extremely pleased. Of all the needs in Labrador, there's no question that a consistent ask of so much of the Big Land and, frankly, of so much of Newfoundland, is to complete the Trans-Labrador Highway. By complete, it means pavement and an efficient, safe highway with support along the route. We're talking hundreds and hundreds of kilometres. There's still a lot to do. A lot has been done by the previous administration and a lot more to do.

In these times of trying to find money, it's amazing that my colleague, the Minister of Transportation and Works – and through his team and his effort and listening, frankly, to the four of us from Labrador, the Premier and the rest of caucus – was able to come up with \$63.7 million for continued activity on the Trans-Labrador Highway. That's primarily what we call the Phase III and that's going to be a huge boost.

The other exciting thing about this announcement is – and I'm not sure if it's out there in the public, so I won't make it here tonight in the House – the federal government is also getting ready to make a contribution to that same project. They also understand the importance of it. I would see substantial progress being made on that highway this year.

So when I hear people say you're only doing 17 kilometres, folks, you're following snippets of

thoughts and maybe some deliberate misleading that's going on. Mr. Speaker, 17 kilometres refers to the amount of pavement on the Phase III that wasn't completed last year; therefore, it's carried over this year. So we have 17, plus \$63.7 million from the provincial government, plus a substantial amount from the federal government, plus many other paving projects.

I met with the Minister of Transportation and Works just the other night here in the House and looked at some of the other great projects. My colleague for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair has a lot of great projects going on in her area this year. That should go a long way to helping some long-needed problems in terms of just moving around. It's very good to see.

Another project that I'd like to talk about in terms of money – and yes, it's under infrastructure development, but I can tell you when you're connecting communities, it's all about social connectivity. Labrador has an interesting characteristic with it.

I think it was just two Sundays ago I was still snowmobiling in Churchill Falls. We do like to say we get 10 months of winter and two months of bad skidooing. Snowmobiling is really important. It's long been talked about that the Member for Torngat Mountains – that is how he travels. Wintertime is when he does get around to see people. I think a lot of folks in this province would see winter as a time to cluster around the fireplace, stay warm, and maybe we'll see our neighbours and friends in the summer.

In Labrador, it's the opposite. That's when you get out and about. You're starting to see great people and friends, and to see some \$730,000 maintained for the Labrador teams. We also have a substantial amount of money, a similar amount of money, for the grooming subsidy. This is a highway of snow and ice and it's extremely important for bringing all those communities together.

I'm sorry, it's \$351,000 for the Labrador grooming subsidy and \$730,000 for that travel subsidy for those Labrador teams to travel back and forth.

Another very important project that's going on off the North Coast – again, speaking of vulnerability and important social issues – is within the territory, the self-government of Nunatsiavut. Nunatsiavut is a very proud area. We've just marked recently a 10th anniversary.

In the community of Hopedale is a former American base. It was the satellite station, a radar site, and, unfortunately, when they pulled out they left a bit of a mess, which is typical, frankly. I find within the Department of Environment and Conservation we are dealing with a lot of legacy and it's a main preoccupation of so many people. Nevertheless, we're getting to the bottom of it.

To that end, and further about the most vulnerable, we decided we needed to maintain the clean-up activity that's going on around that base at Hopedale. To date, the government has spent in excess of \$12 million. It's primarily around the remediation and cleanup of PCB contaminated soil. That work is going to continue and we've allocated some \$1.46 million to carrying that on.

I guess I need to also think about the rest of the province, which I do. I'm just being a little facetious. I have to say, I think I was maybe two hours on the job on the 15th of December in my office sitting in a boardroom and I understood there was a large demonstration up on the Terra Nova River with the trestle that was going on.

The Member for Terra Nova and his colleagues in the area and so on were on the phone, were meeting with me right away about the urgency and the importance of fixing and finding a solution for a trestle that, frankly, our department has basically condemned. It's not in a great state. We don't believe it's safe.

We are enjoying good co-operation with the local population. This is a facility they use extensively. I'm very pleased to tell the House we have allocated substantial monies that we hope to match with perhaps some federal partners and perhaps some other partners, and we look forward to proceeding with this project this year of renovating, perhaps replacing that trestle.

Plus, it's important that with such a long facility such as is the abandoned – sorry, not the abandoned, but the former railway that was the Newfoundland Railway. We have some 130-plus overpasses and we are concerned about their integrity and so on. So we've allocated another substantial amount of money, in the vicinity of \$250,000, that will start feasibility work on those that are the most vulnerable.

So we have vulnerable infrastructure, but, of course, we're concerned about human safety. We also get the point that these pieces of infrastructure are very important for the connectivity of people that are travelling between communities. That ATV trail has become very popular and I'm very pleased to see our government moving in a direction to support it.

I also want to talk about good things that are going on. I'm going to make a plug right now. If you want to see and talk about social and economic activities coming together, that is happening. The Member for Baie Verte – Green Bay mentioned the upcoming Mining Conference that is hosted every year in their community in early June.

I know about this event every year. I must say, I've never been to it because I've always been one week later in Labrador, in association with what used to be called the Voisey's Bay and Beyond Conference. Now we refer to it as Expo Labrador. This is a real coming together of promise, optimism, plans, ideas, networking and business dealing around three or four days in Central Labrador, in Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

I would refer to my colleague from Baie Verte – Green Bay, that often I find the delegates from his conference – because it's mining and so much about Labrador is mining – off they come to Goose Bay. They've got a pretty busy month between his conference and the one that we have in Lake Melville. It's great to see the province come together around the importance of mining. In Labrador, we've got other things going on of course, but Expo Labrador is a wonderful showcase for it.

Finally, I wanted to come back to just a final plug around the budget and the importance of understanding that we listened. We heard that

whatever we're going to do with this budget and these decisions, we've got to make sure that those most vulnerable are not feeling any more threatened. In fact, I'm pleased to be part of a government where – I have to tell you, we went in on a Sunday and we came out on a Thursday. It was a marathon session of decision making and so on, a lot of camaraderie, a lot of understanding and a lot of working with department officials. But to see the work that went into making sure the allocation of the monies that we had would go to those most vulnerable, it was uppermost in everybody's mind, and we had to keep going until we got it right.

I got to say, we went back to the drawing board many times, but I'm very pleased to see how it did turn out. I'm very appreciative now that you can go online and look at the calculator, and understand – for those who are most concerned – how much more benefit they will receive as a result of the budget and as a result of the facts that the government that I am associated with was actually learning, listening, thinking and moving forward.

With that, Mr. Speaker, some-20 seconds left, perhaps I'll say thank you very much and maybe we'll see at the next budget.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I am very happy to stand and to speak this evening on Concurrence. Because of our small but mighty caucus, my colleague for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi and I share all the critic areas between the two of us. I must say, we are very committed to that. We are very happy to be able to work like Trojans in order to be able to cover all these critic areas. We have the energy, we have the smarts, we have the spunk and chutzpah to be able to do this. So I'm very happy.

Mr. Speaker, the first thing I'd like to do tonight is I would like to do a favour for my colleague

for Baie Verte – Green Bay. I would like to take a few minutes of my time to kind of help him and do him a favour. He misquoted the amazing Kevin Major in the House, and I know that wasn't his intention so I'm going to try and help correct him so that he can save face and so that it can be recorded in Hansard.

Now, what my colleague for Baie Verte – Green Bay said, he said that Kevin Major said he was ashamed to be a Newfoundlander and Labradorian, that he was ashamed. He said that that's what I said. What I would like to do is I would like to correct it for him so that the next time he sees Kevin Major he will know that it's been corrected and he will know what Kevin Major, in fact, did say.

What Kevin Major said after government closed all the libraries, he said, this week – listen carefully now.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: I ask my colleagues to listen carefully because we don't want anybody misquoted in this House. He said, "This week I was humiliated by my government.

"These are the most troublesome words I have written in a very long time. And I have written many words in my time, most all of them about a homeland that I care for deeply.

"It is a homeland I wish to see grow spiritually and intellectually, one I wish to see prosper. As do you, I do not doubt.

"But taxing books and forcing a mass closure of libraries is absolutely not the way to go about it.

"The citizens of Newfoundland –

AN HON. MEMBER: Oh, oh!

MS. ROGERS: I would wonder if my colleague for Mount Pearl North, he probably wants to hear this as well because I know he's a fan of Kevin Major.

MR. KENT: (Inaudible) sorry.

MS. ROGERS: I know he's a fan of Kevin Major, so I won't repeat what I just read because I know that you have listened very carefully before. You probably read this letter.

"But taxing books and forcing a mass closure of libraries is absolutely not the way to go about it.

"The citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador are in a financial quagmire, and, true enough, it is not the present government that put us there." – Kevin's got the picture – "But it is the members of this government who must demonstrate our priorities as a society as we struggle out of deficit and debt.

"Literacy must be a priority.

"Safeguarding easily accessed, knowledge-based resources must be a priority."

This is an interesting few lines coming up now, Mr. Speaker. "There are some belts that as citizens in a civilized, forward-thinking society we refrain from tightening. The belt that preserves and protects intellectual well-being is one of them, especially in light of the small fraction of the overall budget represented by this tax and these cuts.

"I urge you all to reassess and reevaluate the choices being made.

"We, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, need the conscientious, enlightened judgement of you the women and men elected to serve us.

"in outrage and in hope, Kevin Major" – who happens to be the author of 18 books, a lot of them about Newfoundland including: *As Near to Heaven by Sea: A history of Newfoundland and Labrador*, *No Man's Land*, *Hold Fast*, *Blood Red Ochre* and *The House of Wooden Santas*.

This, Mr. Speaker, is not a man who is ashamed to be a Newfoundlander and Labradorian. This indeed is a man who is incredibly proud to be a Newfoundlander and Labradorian, incredibly proud of our heritage, incredibly hopeful. This is a man who has written a letter because he has hope.

He has hope in the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and he is challenging every one of us

in this House of Assembly. He is challenging us to be forward thinking. He said that not everything is on the table; that is what he is saying. So I hope that my colleague for Baie Verte – Green Bay sees that, in fact, Kevin Major is not ashamed. He is angry, but he is hopeful. That's what we're hearing from the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: That is what I believe every one of us in this House is hearing from our constituents. We are hearing anger, but from many of them we are also hearing hope. They know that a budget is all about choices. They know that; everyone here knows that. Every single bit of that budget is about choices. Again, as our Minister of Finance told us, she went line by line by line making choices. Although again, I would like to say that's not what a Minister of Finance does, goes line by line, but comes up with a bigger vision. Then it's that bigger vision that influences every single choice that is made in a budget.

I can't figure out what kind of choices she has made. I just went through the Budget Speech again and I looked for indications of what that big picture is, and all I could find was the Minister of Finance constantly going back to fiscal realities or the bottom line, or the debt or the deficit, which is all part of a reality; but when Members of government keeps standing up in the House and referring back to the Official Opposition who, not so long ago, were occupying their seats and constantly blame them for the situation that we're in – well, we all know that. But how do we move forward? That's what we should be talking about. Now the blame back and forth but how do we move forward.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's exactly what Kevin Major was talking about. I urge you all to reassess and re-evaluate the choices being made. We, the people of

Newfoundland and Labrador, need the conscientious, enlightened judgement of you, the women and men elected to serve us. He wants us to move forward.

So, Mr. Speaker, I was looking in this budget again. I was going to go through critic area by critic area, department by department for Concurrence. But when I was hearing some of my colleagues from government speaking, I kind of thought, okay, maybe we're getting it wrong. Maybe they do have a big vision. Maybe there is a vision beyond just picking people's pockets and taxing everybody. Maybe there is a vision.

I kept looking through here, through the budget and I can't find it. Mr. Speaker, I want to find it. I want to find the big vision. I want to find that overarching vision that guided every single choice that was made in the budget. I couldn't find it.

The opening statement by the minister in her speech is: "Mr. Speaker, today, in our government's first budget, we are laying out a fiscal plan that allows our province to regain control of government finances." So not about pulling us forward or not about harnessing the energy or leading the people or looking at diversity. She says: "It is a credible plan, with clear objectives, transparent goals, and targets to which we will hold ourselves accountable. It is critical that we do so."

Then she blames, again, the government: "The uncontrolled growth in expenditures, the dramatic fall in revenues and oil production, exacerbated by poor decision making by the previous government – have produced a serious and unsustainable imbalance that must be corrected." These are the words of an accountant; these are not the words of a visionary for our province. I'm concerned about that because that's what we need right now. We all know that we're in a really tough situation financially. We need to be able to get out of this tough situation, absolutely. But how is it that we do that? Is it just by expecting everybody to tighten their belts?

I kept wondering, what is this government's vision for Newfoundland and Labrador right now. What is that overarching plan? Where does government want Newfoundland and Labrador

to be in the next few years, aside from just talking about debt and tightening our belts? I'm not naive; I know that the debt is considerable, that we have \$14.7 billion in debt and that our deficit is \$1.8 billion. I know that's really important and I know that has to be dealt with. But I'm not quite sure they have done it adequately in this budget. I don't know that there's any forward thinking that's pulling us out of it. I looked for some stimulus spending and I looked for ways of diversification and, again, I couldn't find it.

The other thing I found curious is that climate change is not even mentioned in the budget at all, which I find quite interesting when it's such a big issue, and it's not in the budget. But I did find a return to addictions in this budget that the only thing really that – there are temporary tax measures and there's tax fairness – although I don't think the way they're doing the taxing is very fair at all. Most people in Newfoundland and Labrador don't think it's fair either, most economists don't think it's fair, and labour doesn't think it's fair. I'm not so sure how they arrived at the fact that they think it's fair, but I don't think it's fair. It's really, really regressive.

What I did find, really, what they're doing is just hoping that oil prices will come back up again. The main goal here is taxes and hoping that the oil prices will come back up. Then on page 5 of the budget – I've mentioned this before, but I think it's worth noting again. They're saying beyond 2016 – so this is the economy and where we're headed. The topic of this particular section is: Where we are headed. It says, "Beyond 2016, economic growth is expected to be curtailed by a combination of factors, including declines in capital investments as major projects move beyond peak development and the requirement for further provincial deficit reduction measures." So we all knew that. We knew last year that that was going to be happening.

"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. Provincial deficit reduction measures ..." – so that's what government is doing, what they're doing to reduce our deficit, reduce our debt. So the

measures they're doing, it's the Government Renewal Initiative measures, which is GRIM. I would like to say that the GRI, the Government Renewal Initiative, add that "m", measures, is GRIM.

"Provincial deficit reduction measures are estimated to account for 40 to 50 per cent of predicated declines in these broad measures of economic activity."

Now, that's concerning. I would think that's concerning to the government. That's concerning to us. It's kind of a bleak outlook. So I don't know – I went through a number of the pages looking for the actions of what government is going to do and it ends up: "Mr. Speaker, I can assure the people of the province we will not stop until we have our province back on stable financial footing and we have restored confidence in the fiscal future of this great province we are proud to call home."

Mr. Speaker, I'm not quite sure how they're going to get there, aside from the taxing. They're hoping the price of oil will go up and that will be their saviour. Now, the other thing I found kind of interesting is that the DBRS, which is a bond-rating agency, said in an interview with CBC in April '16, about Newfoundland and Labrador and about this government's budget, "The more substantive proposals for restructuring programs and reducing spending are still being developed and will not be presented until the fall."

That's kind of scary, Mr. Speaker, because basically what this bond-rating agency is saying is that –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: – maybe they've been speaking with government. I don't know, but somehow they've figured that there's going to be more restructuring. So the grim exercise, that grim approach that government is going to lay on the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, they're waiting to see these further cuts.

Then they're saying, "As major investment projects near completion (e.g., Hebron and

Muskrat Falls), the economic outlook is only expected to deteriorate further. The province expects a prolonged period of adjustment characterized by years of economic contraction, declines in population and employment, and for unemployment to rise to nearly 20%."

I tell you, Mr. Speaker, the government's grim initiative paints a grim picture, so I don't see how this budget – even though they're taxing people in different ways, particularly with that levy and it's not fair progressive taxation, and they're hoping on oil prices going up, but the outlook is bleak. The government is saying in their own budget that outlook is bleak. This DBRS bond-rating agency is saying that the outlook is bleak. So what is government offering us? A very bleak picture, something that's very, very grim.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I believe that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador expected something better, expected something different. And government cannot just keep saying to the previous government, well, you made a mess and we're in a mess because you're in a mess. They've asked for the job to lead us out of this, so they have to stop complaining about that because that's tired now.

So they are the leaders. They are the ones who supposedly will lead us out of this. They are the ones who are going to – but we haven't seen that plan yet. All we've seen is cut, cut, cut, line by line by line, and we haven't seen an overall, overarching plan and vision of how to stimulate the economy because they're saying that their grim measures, measures that they're doing through their Government Renewal Initiative is actually to slow down the economy and it's going to create unemployment, that unemployment is going to rise –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: – and they've also got verification from the bond-rating agency that they're right about that. So the bond-rating agencies got it figured out as well.

It's no wonder at times government bristles when we try and raise these issues because it's

not looking good. They don't have a plan. They haven't developed a plan that harnesses the resiliency and the willingness of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: – to help get us out of this situation that we're in.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are willing to roll up their sleeves. They're willing to help work. They're willing to get us out of this situation. We have to have progressive taxation. We have to have an overarching vision that stimulates the economy, that harnesses the natural resources of our people, that creates that real diversification that gets people working because our crisis is an unemployment crisis. That's what needs to be addressed, and that's not what this government addressed.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Speaker reminds the hon. Member her time for speaking has expired.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Before the Speaker recognizes the hon. Member, the Speaker would remind all Members that while single conversations may not seem too loud, when you have a number of them going on at the one time it is very disruptive to the House. I would ask that you take your conversations outside.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm delighted to have an opportunity to rise in this hon. House today to talk about the tremendous work being done in Newfoundland

and Labrador toward ensuring the well-being and protection of children and youth. Each one of us here today agrees that our children and youth are our most valuable resource. Our hope is that they are given the opportunity to grow, thrive and succeed.

As a mother of two children, I certainly share the sentiment of wanting to ensure safety and protection of our children and youth. Our government remains committed to continuing to build a revitalized child protection system that is responsive to the priority needs of our children and youth, as well as continuing to make significant progress in creating a culture of accountability, excellence and consistency across all programs in all regions.

Our government also shares the philosophy which resulted in the creation of the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services to address systemic issues identified through internal and external reports, in particular, the Clinical Services Review, 2011. Recommendations of the Clinical Services Review continue today to serve as the department's guiding framework.

Undoubtedly, since the department was created, a number of significant milestones have been achieved, which enhance the services and care provided to children, youth and their families. Every accomplished milestone can be credited to the input, hard work and co-operation of Child, Youth and Family Services staff throughout our province who are committed to making a positive difference and significantly impact the lives of our children and youth.

We continue to move forward with a focus on further enhancements to child and youth care. That is why budget 2016-17 continues the support of these efforts with an investment of approximately \$150 million for child protection. Mr. Speaker, \$150 million for child protection: this is what Government Renewal Initiative is. This is what GRI is.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: This continued support will help us to drive change that results in the best practices and enhanced approaches to supporting children and youth in need of protection. While I've only been with this

department for five months, it was immediately obvious how passionate employees are about what they do on a day-to-day basis.

I've also experienced the high level of professionalism in which the work concerning the areas of child protection, youth corrections and adoptions is conducted. It is within the context of this professionalism that many difficult situations and decisions are encountered on an ongoing basis.

The assessment of risk is a major component of the duties performed by many professionals, including social workers on a daily basis. Social workers regularly work with families receiving services from the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services to deal with a variety of risk areas as a result of the action or inaction of a parent or parents.

These risk areas for children include examples, such as: physical and emotional harm; sexual abuse and exploitation; inappropriate supervision; substance abuse or other abuse. All matters are taken very seriously, as well as the well-being of children and youth is our primary focus. While cases can be extremely complex in nature, the department's role is to protect the best interest of children and youth who are or are at risk of maltreatment.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services continues to succeed in laying a strong foundation to address the systemic issues in child protection services in the province. Since the creation of the department, programs and program delivery are constantly being evaluated to ensure they are as effective and as efficient as possible. We are all aware of the difficult decisions our government was forced to make because of the unprecedented financial situation we inherited.

Mr. Speaker, on June 15, 2015, the Member for Mount Pearl North acknowledged that their administration also had to make difficult decisions with their budget. The Member said, and I quote, "We had very difficult decisions to make in this Budget process, as you know. We have made them, we will defend them, we will stand by them, and we will live with those decisions."

As we lay the foundation to regain control of government finances, we are guided by unwavering values and we will take care of the most vulnerable in our province. That is why, despite the difficult fiscal realities facing the province, budget 2016-2017 reiterates our government's commitment to ensuring the protection and well-being of children and youth.

We have made every effort to minimize impact on our front-line services as we navigate through these difficult financial times. That is why our government chose to amalgamate Child, Youth and Family Services sites where we could not have any impact on client service or impact on our staffing model.

The closures affected Gambo and Port Saunders. But the previous administration, with the minister of that time – the minister who was the MHA for Terra Nova – closed three offices on the West Coast of this province. The previous administration closed Piccadilly, Stephenville Crossing and Burgeo. However, it is important to note that the closures from this previous government and the past did not result in any layoffs.

Port Saunders had a caseload of six. The quota is one staff to 20 children. That's what we try to maintain. It was one to six in Port Saunders. This one affected employee had the option to continue employment at Roddickton's site. Child, Youth and Family Services will continue to be provided for the area through our Roddickton office. In terms of Gambo, there are currently 91 cases and 13 foster homes. A total of eight positions will amalgamate with our Gander office which has 20 positions.

It is our belief that the closure of offices will consolidate staff and enhance the effectiveness of child protection services through strengthened teams for case management. It was also the previous administration's belief. It will result in more social workers coming together in one site to help make decisions based on greater input.

We remain committed to the approved organizational structure of one to 20 and team structures. Safe and sustainable communities are an important focus for our newly elected government, and child protection is an important aspect of this focus.

Like every government department, we had to do our part to help keep our deficit under control. For Child, Youth and Family Services it was important that we find a way forward that allowed us to continue to meet our mandate and commitments without any direct impact on our service delivery. I feel budget 2016-17 has helped us, the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services, achieve that objective.

Despite the difficult fiscal realities facing the province, budget 2016-17 reiterates our government's commitment to ensuring the protection of our children and youth in Newfoundland and Labrador. This is particularly important when you understand the context in which these services are delivered.

While the population of the province continues to decline, the number of children entering into care continues to rise. However, Mr. Speaker, it appears that over the last couple of months that number is stabilizing, finally.

We currently have approximately 1,000 children in our care, with another 5,000 involved with our Protective Intervention Program. Of those in care, approximately 60 per cent are in sibling groups and 33 per cent are of Aboriginal descent. We recognize we still have challenges in many of our remote Labrador communities. We will continue our focus on improving caseloads in these areas.

In terms of foster care, we have approximately 975 children including our Level 4 staffed residential placements and out-of-province placements. We constantly hear the old adage: It takes a village to raise a child. Well, this is also very true when it comes to child protection.

Our government understands the importance of working together with stakeholders as a cohesive group. We are focused on working in tandem with all of our stakeholders and others interested in ensuring our children and youth receive the best possible care. At the end of the day, we all collectively share in the same goal, namely the safety and well-being of children and youth in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Our government's continued investment in *Budget 2016* clearly articulates our ongoing

commitment to improve and enhance service coordination and delivery in all regions of our province.

Our government is continuing to move forward to enhance the lives of young people in a variety of ways. We are addressing poverty, violence and mental health issues, enhancing education, working collaboratively and effectively with Aboriginal communities, improving services for persons with disabilities and enhancing health care and wellness.

As I stated earlier, the children and youth of Newfoundland and Labrador should have an opportunity to grow, thrive and succeed in a safe and nurturing environment.

This is about our children and youth. They deserve nothing less, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I was caught a little off guard there. The hon. Member had some time left so I wasn't expecting her to sit down as quickly as she did. I appreciate the opportunity to speak in Concurrence here tonight and have a chance again to speak to the budget.

One of the challenges we face every day is based on the response we receive from people in the province and have been continuously receiving from people of the province. We try to pick through the material and say where do we best use our time, what is best to discuss and what matters should we raise, because there is so much the people of the province are responding about. There are so many different areas and so many different topics that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are writing us about, calling us about and stopping us on the street about to say their view and their opinion on the budget.

We spend – it's amazing, I laugh at it. I shouldn't laugh, I suppose, because it's a pretty serious matter, but it's kind of humorous in a

way. We're saying where are we going to go today or what issues will we raise because there are so many people asking us to raise so many matters on a regular basis. If it be education – education is a key one of late because parents are just starting to realize and understand what the impacts of some of the decisions are on education. They're becoming concerned. What a lot of people can't understand is why you have programs that have been proven to be beneficial and provide a better quality of education, where available for students – why some of those programs are being reduced.

I don't know how to tell it to people only to say, well, they're saying it's tough times, a tough budget and they have to make cuts. Then, the next question is why are they creating a new program, an additional service, an additional program, when they can't fund the good programs that are there today? Intensive Core French is a significant one.

I had a parent contact me the other day who told me that there were two students in the class who didn't make the draw for Intensive Core French. So out of this whole school and these classes – and kids are going to school together and going through year by year, and now a group of them want to go to Intensive Core French – there were two of them. She said my daughter came home in tears – in absolute tears, in no other way but absolute tears – and upset; why can't I do Intensive Core French with my friends, Mom.

Now, how do you tell the child that? Two children in the school who got missed out on the draw and yet, at the same time, they're beating the bushes and doing all the work to bring in full-day kindergarten. Why can't they postpone it? If they're in such difficult times, instead of bringing in a new program or a new service, why can't they postpone full-day kindergarten?

There's no doubt full-day kindergarten has proven to have good results; no doubt about it. No doubt about it at all. But as Members opposite have said many times, you can't be all things to all people. I've said it when I sat over there, you can't be all things to all people. You can't. Why would you put more pressure on a system, a higher demand, a new program, a new service that is, yes, a good program, but you decrease the good programs while you're doing

that. It just doesn't make sense to people. It certainly doesn't make sense to me.

I know the Minister of Education, when he was Opposition critic, talked about it before and criticized us for making cuts in education. Fair enough. That was his role; it's our role here today. He's minister opposite over there now and he's the minister in charge.

He criticized us. He criticized us last year when we increased the cap sizes for classes. He criticized us right here in the House of Assembly. He talked about what's wrong with you guys over there in the government. Families and teachers are raising red flags, is what he said here in the House, Mr. Speaker. He said they're raising red flags already. He used words like students and teachers have taken another hit on the reductions that they're doing.

The Minister of Education stood in his place here in the House and he said, look what you did. It was bad and wrong for you to make cuts in teachers, increase class sizes; bad for you to do it but we're going to do more of it. And people are saying how did he square that. How does a government square that by saying what the previous administration – which Members opposite like to talk about all the time.

That's their strategy. They're calling us the former premier and former – that's all their strategy. Fine enough, that's the game they want to play. If they want to recognize us in our place here for what we represent or who we are, that's up to them to do that. We'll continue to represent, call them by their proper titles and respect their position here in the House.

When they were here, they criticised us for doing these things. And then they do more of it. The Member opposite just here tonight talked about how we closed offices. I think she was referring to AES offices. We closed AES offices, a bad thing for us to do. When they were the government they closed AES offices – bad, bad. It wasn't a good thing for them to do. Fair enough.

Just like they are today, we had tough decisions to make. As a matter of fact, the minister of Education last year, in responding to the current Minister of Education, in one of his comments

he said: Mr. Speaker, I think everybody in the province is well aware of the fiscal situation of the province and the commitment that we have to look at all of our processes.

As a matter of fact, the Education critic at the time, currently the Education Minister, criticised us and said: You're reducing programs before you've done your full assessment on the value of what programs are good and what programs are not – criticised us. And now they're doing exactly the same thing. Not only doing exactly the same thing; when it was bad for us to increase the cap size, they've done it further. When it was bad for us to close an AES office, they've done more.

So these are the kinds of things that people are saying to us, Mr. Speaker. These are the kinds of things that people are talking to us about. I talked today in Question Period about the courthouses. I talked about the Harbour Grace courthouse at some length. I know the area well, I have family there. Lots of people live in the area. It's a booming area; lots of new housing, young families and lots of pressure on municipalities for enhanced services. It's a good area, lots of good people out there and so on. We talked about this today, as I said, in Question Period.

But they're wondering – so we asked a petition to come in and the Member brought in a petition. It's against the decision of the government; we're going to vote for the budget. What that means is I'm against the decision that government made, but I'm going to vote in favour of it. Now, each individual Member has to sort that out themselves; every Member in the House has to sort that out themselves.

I had a Member opposite in a conversation there since the budget who said, I remember when – they talk about Bill 29. Everyone remembers Bill 29, and then we took action to fix it because we agreed it was the wrong thing for us to do, we got to fix it. They hung us out on it over and over and over, and they still bring it up.

People have said, and the Member opposite has said, do you know what? This budget is our Bill 29, because people are not going to forget it. It's not going to go away and people are not going to forget it. I don't believe it is.

I know Members opposite are being told, just ride it out. The days are going to get easier. The days are going to get better. We know that. I would expect the leader to be telling caucus members: Settle down, it's the right thing to do. These are tough decisions. This is what leadership is about. You upset people, that's it.

We heard Members opposite say it's not about votes. If they don't elect me again I'll have a clear conscience, I did the right thing. There might be no one to elect them again because there'll be no one else to vote for them because they're all going to be gone. That's what's going to happen. We hear it from people.

I got a letter from a lady yesterday. She talked about how she's a young woman, her and her boyfriend and how they got through their education. She even joked and talked about how she is supported by the food bank. Now, she joked about it because she said it's the mom and dad food bank. My mom and dad look after us. Lots of times we get leftover meals and so on from mom and dad and that helps us out.

This year she was looking forward to buying a vehicle and touring the province. She talked about how she went from a substandard, or not ideal basement apartment, to a rental property now that's above ground and how that's a big step for them.

Actually, she wrote the Minister of Finance. I was sent a copy of it since. She talked about all of that and talked about it at length. She talks about: Why should I stay here when everything I'm trying to save and do, and everything I'm trying to do to move myself forward is being taken away in a tax or a fee?

Now, the Members opposite were quite clear last year on taxes because they beat us over the head day after day on the HST increase and made clear commitments, it was bad and it was wrong. The Premier himself talked about how it was a job killer. He talked about it over and over. He said it's going to crush the economy and it's bad. Don't do it. Don't do it. Don't do it.

We were standing in our place saying, we're in a tough fiscal spot. We've got to roll in our spending. We've got to adjust our taxation. We can't keep going the way we're going. I was the

worst in the world for doing it, Mr. Speaker. I was the worst son of a gun in the world for taking that position.

The former Leader of the Opposition – that's the way he likes to reference ourselves in the House, so maybe I'll use that. The former Leader of the Opposition, the Premier of today, stood here and talked about budget documents. He talked about Japan and their own budget document. In that country consumption fell drastically. Their economy went stagnant. Future tax increases were postponed for fear of prolonged economic difficulties. The research is clear: An increase in HST is a job killer. Those are the words the Premier used.

Well, if only it was the HST that they decided to do. How much further ahead would we be today than we actually are if it was only the HST increase that they decided to do? But it's not what they decided to do. They did much more than that, and that's what people are concerned about.

If you take any part of the budget in isolation – you take a little piece of it in isolation – people would say, that, by itself, I can understand that; I can understand increasing fees or I can understand them trying to make adjustments in some programs or services. But when you put it all together, people are saying – their position is you can't move in the province without the negative impact hitting you.

I've asked the Premier here in the House about what the impact is going to be on HST on the cost of groceries. He said there's no HST on groceries. That's not the point. The point is that it's going to cost more to cause those groceries to be available on the shelves in stores in our province.

I would suggest and suspect, Mr. Speaker, that the more remote and more challenging the transportation needs are of a particular community, the bigger the impact is going to be because now we've got increased costs for fuel. It's significant for gas; less significant for diesel, but a significant cost for fuel, plus the HST.

We've got taxes now on insurance, which it's going to cost more to operate vehicles. That's not just the vehicles to deliver produce – fresh

fruit and vegetables and so on – to grocery stores. That's also when the grocery store picks up the phone and calls the local electrician and says: I have a problem with my cooler, can you come over and fix it. His costs are more to operate his business, so he's going to pass that on to the grocery store too. When he brings that truck down to the local service station to get it fixed, it's going to cost him more to fix that as well and to have that repaired as well. He's going to pass that on to the grocery store as well. And on it goes.

My question was about what analysis has been done to determine what the impacts are going to be on the cost of food for the people of the province. I don't believe they have it. At least they haven't shared it yet, anyway. When all this rolls out, if we can look into our crystal ball and look forward six months or a year or 18 months down the road, what's going to be the impact on goods and services? One of those obvious that we all need is affordable and good-quality food purchases at grocery stores. What's the impact? They don't know what it is.

We had chosen a plan over the last number of years that was going to be smooth and it wouldn't shock the system, was words I've used in the past. We didn't need to shock the economy and shock the province. As a matter of fact, if you look at core government – and I stand to be corrected. I'm sure the Minister of Finance can correct me, but if I remember correctly, the number of public servants in core government today is less than what it was prior to 2010. I think 2009, but 2009-2010, and since that time the number of public servants in core government – again, I stand to be corrected, Mr. Speaker, and I apologize if it's not right, but that's my recollection on it.

It has continued to decrease in slight numbers. The reason why people might be surprised to hear that is because it was done over a period of time where it wouldn't have a big impact on the people of the province. People wouldn't see and feel those particular hits.

Mr. Speaker, when you go from here to here overnight, that has a big impact and people feel it. It's hard for them. They don't have a crystal ball to look into to say what's the impact going to be in six months or a year down the road?

That's why we hear the government talk about evidence-based decision making. That's good policy for them. They're going to make evidence-based choices. Good for them.

To do it as a campaign promise as part of their commitment and so on, I'm perfectly okay with that. That's a good way to do it, to say we're going to do this through an evidence-based process. We're going to analyze. Now there is in business, of course, what's known as analysis paralysis. Analysis paralysis, it's a term known in business and it brings businesses to a halt. When businesses over-analyze and don't take steps to rectify their business operations or to take steps to – businesses are in business to make profit and to do business, and they don't make those steps. They analyze too far and they can't move fast enough and change fast enough.

We've seen that in big industry. We've seen it in airlines, as an example. When you have a few days of bad weather, Air Canada takes weeks to catch up. They say, well, that's part of the – they've been too lean. They try to get too lean but when they're analyzing their issues, they spend so much time analyzing they can't fix the problem.

We don't want government to do that. Government has been criticized for being over-analytical and doing too much of that red tape in the past. We reduced a lot of it, and we know this government is committed to reducing red tape and it was talked about with the premiers today.

Mr. Speaker, the point being is that if you create all those hardships and you haven't analyzed the impacts, then they're very dangerous decisions to make. We've seen that, and we're seeing that now with this budget. We're seeing this now with the decisions that are being made by this government.

Mr. Speaker, the part of the government that is also creating – or the decisions and process the government is doing that's creating a problem for people in the province, is people are saying, look, it's the spring of the year and I was going to replace the windows in my house, but I don't know if I'm going to have a job in six months and I'm waiting to find out what's going to come in budget number two in the fall. This is

having a big impact on spending in the province. This is having a big impact on investment.

When businesses are saying we're trying to figure out where the province is going. The picture painted by the government has been one that's doom and gloom. The Budget Speech itself, and the lead up days before the budget was it's doom and gloom and there's nothing good coming out of this, and part of the budget is how much the population's going to decrease and how much it's going to suffer for businesses and so on. So we heard all of that leading up to the budget. People are now going, oh, what's happening?

Well, one of the interesting things that's taken place over the last few days is they've really changed their messaging. They came in here and said things are so bad, we got to bring in a bad budget. Well, people weren't accepting of that. They say, well, decision making and the budget, there are choices that you make as a government.

Of course, Members opposite said it's the previous administration, previous administration. I'm going to tell you, Mr. Speaker, I've said it before in this House and I couldn't be more sincere when I say this. More than anything else I hear from people of the province is they're sick and tired of hearing those words, the previous administration and the blame. They are sick and tired of hearing it.

I can't be more serious or more accurate or more genuine or more sincere by saying everybody who has a problem – if someone has a problem with education, they'll raise it. If someone has a problem with health care, they'll raise it. If someone has a problem with taxation and fees, they'll raise it. People in all spectrums are raising it. They're raising it broadly, but that's a tactic the government decided to use. That's a tactic they're using and they continue to use it.

Of course, there's a right to use whatever strategy they want, but in the last few days we've seen a change. Because the budget they painted as being so bad, now they're starting to talk about good. We said since day one, there were some good things in the budget. I was glad when things weren't cut. I was surprised when I heard things like courthouses – which is where I

started my comments this evening – were being cut, because I don't think they've done any analysis to determine what the impacts are going to be.

Just last year the Minister of Justice stood here in the House and criticized us over the family violence court in Labrador West and was looking for commitments that we were going to put it in place. Now he's shutting the court down completely; shutting it down completely.

Harbour Grace is the one that comes back to quite regularly, because Harbour Grace is probably the busiest court. Whitbourne, Placentia court closures feed in there. Now, the Members opposite are going to get up and say, well, you closed Whitbourne and you closed other courts. Well, yes, we did. They're going to criticize us for doing it, but as they've done with other things, they're doing more cuts and reductions the same way. It's a busy court, it's a big court.

I know the Member for the area is gravely concerned about it. I believe she's sincere in her concern. I believe she's hearing it from people. Mayors are talking about it; the justice community is talking about it. They're talking about the denial of services and justice services for the people in that region.

I think that's a very important matter and I believe that's an error the government has made. It's unfortunate because they talked about that they will listen to what people have to say and people matter and people are important, but they're not responding to the concerns expressed by the people. That's also a feedback we're receiving from people around the province.

Mr. Speaker, my time has quickly run out. I didn't want to use a speech. We know Members opposite are reading prepared texts that are being provided to them. I've decided not to do that. Members over here are not doing that. We're talking about the experiences we're having and what we're hearing from people in the province. We'll continue to do that right up until the last vote that we have on this budget.

We'll continue to make and share the concerns expressed by people. We'll continue to share the

concerns and ask for changes and why can they make those decisions –

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): Order, please!

The hon. Member's time has expired.

MR. P. DAVIS: We'll continue our work as an Opposition.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm glad to get up and have a few words to say about the Concurrence on social policy. I presented our department's Estimates at this meeting of Education and Early Childhood Development. I want to say thank you to all the officials in the department. I keep saying to the officials in Education and Early Childhood Development that I drew the long straw when it came to senior officials in the department. I have to say, they are amongst the most professional and competent people that I've worked with in my 45 years, so hats off to them.

They say there are always brains behind an operation. They are definitely the folks who are giving us very wise advice. They have been very co-operative and understanding as we try to pull the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador back from the fiscal cliff that the previous government thought they'd just drive us all over and there would be no impact, other than when we hit the bottom.

With respect to education in Newfoundland and Labrador, I think it's important for people in the province to have an understanding of a few key facts. We've heard a lot of rhetoric and then there are the facts. We just heard a lot of rhetoric that time, which I'll easily be able to rebut in a minute.

There are a lot of facts. One of the facts is that from 2004 to 2015 – so over the course of 11

years – the budget for the Department of Education increased by nearly \$300 million. Over the course of 11 years the previous administration increased the budget for the Department of Education by \$300 million almost. But, at the same time, there was a steady decline in the number of students in the province. We know the demographic challenge that we have. Our population is aging. People are having smaller families and that's a fact.

Over the course of time that the previous government increased education, K to 12 spending, by some \$300 million, the population of students that the system is to serve declined by over 12,000 students. In fact, it was closer to a 13,000-student reduction. The number of schools also, likewise, declined from 303 schools to 262 over that 11-year period.

So you have to wonder how it is that we were increasing by that significant per-student amount when the enrolment was going down so much. You wonder about what it was we got in return. If you look at certain test scores and student achievement in schools under the current administration's supervision, then there is cause to question what it is we got for that money.

One of the things that has been raised here in the House of Assembly in Question Period and with me – and I have lots of emails and telephone calls and have had lots of conversations with students. For the information of the Member for Conception Bay South, I'm not sure where it is he gets his information, but I have diligently responded to every person that's gotten in touch with me. If he has some information that's contrary to that, if it isn't just a cheap shot that he decided to throw out here on the House of Assembly floor, I encourage him to back up the evidence with what he said today. Otherwise it is just a cheap shot and that's all it is.

One of the things that's going on, Mr. Speaker, is the allocation of teachers has been provided to the system by the Department of Education. The Department of Education doesn't do the deployment. There's about \$550 million, about 60 per cent of the budget for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development that's represented by teacher salaries and benefits. When we do a calculation in the department on what it would cost for a program,

the figure that we input for a teacher's salary and benefits is \$89,500.

The other day the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island talked about wanting to get rid of multigrading and to have some additional 500 teachers as a result. If you do the math on that, times \$89,500, you see the kinds of numbers we're talking about.

The allocation has been provided to the school districts and the largest one being the English School District. Now that's working its way through. Schools are finding out they have been reduced some portion of a teaching unit, one or more or partial units. What is happening is that principals will now get back to the districts to give them an update about enrolment or programming or what have you. The district will then see if there are opportunities to adjust, provide additional teaching allocations to the system in order to keep up. Then, at the end of the summer, there will be a further adjustment which will help ensure that schools have what they're entitled to under the teacher allocation formula.

Like I said, in response to a question in Question Period from the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island, the English School District, as I understand it, will be advertising for more than 200 teaching positions this summer. There will be more than 200 teaching positions, new positions advertised for this summer.

One of the reasons why is we are following through with the commitment that three parties in this House of Assembly made. Now two parties, the Opposition parties, have decided to renege on their promise to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to have full-day kindergarten. That's their decision because there will be generations of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and families who will remember that. I'll be sure to remember them. I don't plan to fade away any time soon.

Basically, *Budget 2014* committed over \$30 million over three years for full-day kindergarten. Now that was infrastructure and programming. In fact, the French system in the province, the five French schools – the Francophone schools in the province – they've always had full-day kindergarten. There have

been schools that have been offering full-day kindergarten within the teaching allocation that they were given. What we're doing now is implementing the full program.

The Leader of the Opposition got up a few minutes ago and said: Why are you getting rid of a proven program? I'm not sure of the language he used, something about research. I'd like to see the research evidence that he's talking about on Intensive Core French. I'd like to see the research on Intensive Core French because I'm not aware of what he's talking about. If he has some data, empirical evidence on that program here in the province, I'd like to see it. We do know the benefits of full-day kindergarten, there's no question. I've gone over that time and time again.

So just to give him a bit of information about how many people are impacted and then he can judge the proportionate impact. Now I understand, before I go on, that there are families, students and teachers who are disappointed that the province can no longer provide a full teacher unit for a partial class of Intensive Core French. I know that's disappointing. I've talked to many parents who are disappointed by it and I'm disappointed by it, but it's not a practice we can continue.

Intensive Core French; the decision to limit the offerings impacts 14 schools, 20 classes and approximately 140 students – 20 classes in 14 schools. Full-day kindergarten impacts 185 schools, 370 classes and 4,750 students. We're talking 20 classes of Intensive Core French versus 370 classes of full-day kindergarten.

I know that likely comes as no consolation to parents who are bitterly disappointed about the change in Intensive Core French, but that is really the proportionate difference. A program for 4,750 students or a program for about 150 students; a program that has reams and reams of evidence conducted here and elsewhere and not so much on the other end of it. In fact, there are quite significant reductions in the number of students who are taking French immersion in senior grades. There's quite a lot of attrition. I'm not sure if the Member opposite has research conducted on that he'd like to get up and tell us about.

One of the things that has come up – it came up here in the House today – was the whole question of school infrastructure. It was interesting. The PC Party, the Official Opposition, sent out a press release yesterday saying that the Member for Terra Nova had to vote against the budget now because they're going to be using modular classrooms for Riverside Elementary. As I said in Question Period today, over a period of six years the previous administration put 41 modular classrooms in place in schools around the province in order to deal with enrolment capacity issues in school.

Dorset Collegiate, Pilley's Island, had four modulars added. I never heard the Member for Baie Verte – Green Bay, I never heard of him voting against the budget because those modulars were added. I didn't see that happen here. That cost the government \$2 million.

Paradise Elementary had four modulars added to a new school. I didn't see the Member for Topsail – Paradise or the Member for Mount Pearl North vote against the budget that put those modular classrooms in place. Villanova Junior High had five modular classrooms put in place, and I didn't see anyone vote against those budgets.

Holy Trinity Elementary has eight modular classrooms behind it – eight – and I never saw the Member for Cape St. Francis get up in the House of Assembly and vote against the budget that put those eight there. That cost \$4 million.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. KIRBY: Four million dollars for Holy Trinity, but overall it was about \$18.5 million for 41 modulars. Now if this was not an acceptable way to deal with a short- or intermediate-term capacity issues, enrolment capacity issues, a capacity to accommodate student enrolment numbers in schools, than I'm not sure why the previous administration put 41 of them there, why they spent \$18.5 million on it and why we didn't see Members for their own districts voting against their own budget, as now they're demanding the Member for Terra Nova should have to do. So it's completely hypocritical. It's the essence of hypocrisy, basically. So there's that.

Again, like I said, the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island is out decrying overcrowding at Beachy Cove Elementary. I was out at a public meeting there last year where he guaranteed that the school would be open for this September, this coming September in Beachy Cove, in Portugal Cove-St. Philip's, to deal with school capacity issues. That's not going to happen.

What happened was the previous administration promised to build these schools on an accelerated schedule that did not reflect what the understanding is within government in terms of the length of time that it takes to build a school in the province. On some of the schedules they announced, I'd say you'd be challenged to build a house in the length of time, but they were going to build schools in it. Now the schools are not ready, and that's somebody else's fault. We've not been here for six months and now, all of a sudden, these schools they failed to plan for are not our fault.

Similar, the Member for Mount Pearl North, he's complaining that the extension is not going to be on St. Peter's Primary in time. I say if he wanted that to be done sooner, he should have asked his own government to do it sooner because he was at the Cabinet table. That didn't happen. Then he got up in the House of Assembly on a petition one day and said: Oh, you've got – I don't know what he said, four or five – a number of vacant classrooms down at Mary Queen of the World, I think he said, and you can send French immersion students down there.

So I got on the email and I contacted the school council chair out there. I said the Member for Mount Pearl North is standing up in the House of Assembly saying we should start busing your children in French immersion down to the other school on Topsail Road. Is that the position of the school council? They said, no, we haven't had any conversation with him about it. If we were going to make decisions based on what the Member for Mount Pearl North is saying, then I think we'd probably get in a lot of conflict with parents because it's not something that he's even brought to the school council. And I suggest that's probably an appropriate way to deal with things.

Despite all the challenges, there are good things that are happening. Like I said today, the previous administration had access to some \$25 billion over the course of their term of office from various royalties and so on to the province. They chose to spend it whatever way they did.

In the end, on the way out the door, they had a budget where they promised hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of infrastructure that you just can't deliver on, not unless you just put it all on the credit card. That's basically what they're suggesting, I suppose, and we just can't do that. So some of these projects have been delayed, and they're going to be priorities for us once we get this fiscal ship righted. But right now we're dealing with a mess and we're trying to do the best that we can.

While doing the best we can we're actually spending, this year, \$106 million on a number of different school infrastructure projects. Mr. Speaker, \$106 million this year on school infrastructure projects: on new school constructions, on school extensions, on repairs and maintenance – \$106 million. So the suggestion that we're not doing anything to address capacity issues is not true.

Again, these involve schools that were promised on an accelerated schedule that could not be met. There was the Portugal Cove-St. Philip's one the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island guaranteed people just over a year ago that would open. The school in Torbay, a similar situation, was promised. It won't be delivered on the schedule they promised. The Octagon Pond school in Paradise is going to be finished; the Gander grades four to six school; the new school for Conception Bay South; and the Virginia Park School, which has been something that's been out there for quite a long time and still not finished, we're going to finish it. There's also the extension and the renovations for St. Peter's Junior High. So there's quite a bit going on. There are other projects I could talk about as well, but there is quite a lot that is happening.

Another thing that has come up is the issue of busing. I empathize with families who are going to have a change to their routine as a result of the changes in busing. We have the Member for Cape St. Francis – he was out at a public meeting last night making absurd claims about

government's position. That's not a big surprise to me. But he was out at that while we're sitting here in the House of Assembly trying to deal with the Independent Appointments Commission.

Mr. Speaker, basically it boils down to this: over \$50 million is being spent right now, this school year, on busing. And, the projected expenditure for the next school year is almost \$60 million, a tremendous sum of money on busing. The preference for the school districts, and certainly for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, is to spend our money, to focus as much of our expenditures as possible on our core mandate, which is teaching and learning, investments in the classroom. So we're trying to bring the busing costs down.

What are they doing? You'd think they were doing something draconian to students the way you hear the Member for Cape St. Francis talking about this. It's going to cause people to have their schedules changed, and that's difficult for people to deal with. But in the end, we have had double runs for busing in the province before. It's pretty consistent with the district's policies in other areas of the province. It does lead to changes in the opening times for schools. That's to allow for the additional time for pickup and drop-off of students. It's fairly easy to understand. As a result of the changes that the district is making this year, there are 37 fewer buses that are going to be used – 37 fewer buses.

The Opposition would prefer to have that money spent on those 37 additional buses. But it's like everything they say here in the House of Assembly, it's only a million dollars, it's only \$25,000, it's only \$50,000, it's only \$100,000, it's only \$5 million –

MR. KENT: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North, on a point of order.

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: I'd ask you to state the Standing Order.

MR. KENT: No problem, Mr. Speaker.

Standing Order 49. The Minister of Education just referred to a Member being out of the House last evening. He's well aware that's unparliamentary and I would respectfully ask him to withdraw.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, it's well known the Member was on Twitter. His picture was all over the Internet that he was out of the House.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

It is unparliamentary to refer to a Member as being out of the House.

MR. KIRBY: Oh, I withdraw, Mr. Speaker. I saw it on Twitter and I thought it was appropriate. I will sit down now.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I ask the Member to withdraw unequivocally.

MR. KIRBY: Yes, I withdraw unequivocally, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

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

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

It looks like I'm going to be the last speaker in the last Concurrence debate of *Budget 2016*.

So much has happened since April 14, it's hard to know where to start, Mr. Speaker. So much has been said in the House, but so much has been said elsewhere, completely all over the province.

What's disturbing for me here in the House is that when we stand up and speak as Opposition,

government mocks us. They say we don't know what we're talking about. They say that we don't have facts, et cetera, et cetera. I'm getting a bit tired of that. That's why I have decided that for the rest of the debates I'm going to do a lot of letting other people speak, and let them tell their constituents and my constituents that they don't know what they're talking about and that they don't know reality.

I'm going to start tonight with one of my own constituents. This is somebody who does not want to be identified, and I will honour that, of course. I will never say anybody's name here in the House who hasn't asked that their name be said.

This is a constituent who wrote me early on, actually, after the budget came down, on April 18th. The writer says: I am a lawyer, a recent grad and one of your constituents working in St. John's. I'm writing to share my fear and anxiety about the budget with you.

I graduated from a good law school outside of Atlantic Canada in 2013 with \$100,000 in debt. I moved home out of dedication to family and to my home. The salaries here are not competitive with where I studied – I'm protecting the person by not mentioning the province. Despite the fact that I am a lawyer, a job typically associated with at least having enough, I live paycheque to paycheque – and I hope that the government side of the House is hearing this.

I have played with the numbers in the budget. It seems to me a single person without dependents will have to pay around \$3,300 with the \$600 levy. Mr. Speaker, \$3,300 is more than three loan payments. I don't know how I'm supposed to bear this unless I reduce my loan payments, but I am unwilling to do that. I have worked hard for my whole life. I got an education that was extremely inflated in price compared to my colleagues from even 10 years ago and it's only getting worse for the following years.

I am unwilling to take on more interest in my presently \$85,000 of student loans because the previous governments mismanaged the resources and the money they had. In fact, my unwillingness goes to the fact that my partner and I will likely be leaving. We don't own a home. How could we? We don't yet have

children. Having either of these things here is not in our plans now, given these outrageous fees – and I hope we're listening to this. This is only an example. I have many like this.

On two other notes, I state that my nephew was behind in school living in a small rural community – the MHA of which is here in this room. The combined classrooms and/or reduced classroom size will mean that a child like him – so capable of being bright, you should see how deep his curiosity runs – will be pushed along in a school system that is too bogged down to even keep a child back a grade anymore.

Finally, my sister was mentally unwell for a long time. To see the closure of a section of the Waterford today broke my last stable straw. This is too much to take emotionally; it's too much to take financially. Please give my concerns a voice if it's possible.

I communicated with this person about an hour ago to let her know that I was reading this. I got a real big thank you from the person because that person wants everybody in this room to know what this budget is doing to her, one of our young, bright people: a young lawyer ready to commit to this province and is not going to be able to do it.

I have a number of letters like this from people starting out, middle class, and really believing they can't stay. This government is really doing things backwards. The Minister of Education talked about facts. Well, there are facts and there are facts, I realize that. If I tried to spend time trying to untwist the way some of the facts have been presented by the government, I'd use up all my time plus by 1,000 times. I don't intend to try to untwist the facts that they're presenting here. I want to present other facts which are facts.

There is fiscal and economic policy and there are principles in fiscal and economic policy. Surely, the government side, the Minister of Finance and the Premier, everybody else in Cabinet and the backbenchers should know that those policies exist.

One of the really basic economic policies has to do with the employment impacts of spending cuts. This government started from the worst

possible place in doing cuts because, in actual fact, it's in our social programs that we get most employment. Cuts in social programs give us greater unemployment and a drop in the GDP. That is an economic fact.

If you did economics 100, that's what you're taught. And believe it or not, even though we talk about economists on the left and economists on the right, et cetera, if you go into an economics classroom you're getting a neutral course; a course that's teaching you economic policy, no politics involved. In such a course you would be taught exactly what I've just said.

So when we look at industry, when you do cuts in industry you affect employment. Now here's the important thing in this fact: for every \$1 million, you can estimate how many cuts it would mean if you lose a million dollars invested in a certain industry.

I have the list here. It's a very typical economic list. What is the industry that creates the greatest number of jobs per \$1 million? It's the educational services. If you put a million dollars into educational services you get 20.54 equivalent jobs. I mean that's how it's worked out. So education is number one. That's the highest employer when it comes to jobs per \$1 million invested in the industry.

What's the next one? Accommodation and food services. That makes sense. It's 16.25. What's the next one after that? Health care and social assistance. If you invest in that industry it's 15.54 equivalent jobs.

Here's the really interesting thing. Guess which industry that happens here in this province that creates the smallest number of jobs per million dollars. Guess what, the oil and gas. The oil and gas extraction, for every \$1 million you get 0.38 equivalent jobs. That's a fact. That doesn't mean that we don't have oil and gas. Of course we're going to have it, the same way with mining. The second lowest is mining when it comes to the creation of jobs. So they get the money but we don't get the jobs. That's the reality. They get the money but we don't get the jobs.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Speaker has stood on several occasions and asked Members of the Legislature to respect the person that has been identified by the Speaker to speak. I will ask one final time. If we have continued interruptions, whether it's tonight or tomorrow, the person who's interrupting the person identified to speak will not be permitted to either ask or answer questions the following day.

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

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

I will respond to what was shouted out across the floor to me because I don't want anybody in Lab West saying that I want their jobs gone. What I'm pointing out is that if you're going to do cuts in a budget, you look at what creates the most jobs. The government doesn't get to do cuts in the mining industry anyway.

We are happy to have the mining industry and we're happy to have the oil and gas industry. We want them to thrive here, but we have to remember that when it comes to our overall economy – the overall provincial economy when it comes to job creation – the job creation comes from educational services, accommodation and food services, health care and social assistance. Arts, entertainment and recreation is number four. What's the message? Where this government – if it were really interested in job creation, it would see money going into those top four industries as real investment that's going to create jobs. They've done the opposite, Mr. Speaker. They've done the extreme opposite.

The other proof of this that would fit into the educational services – or could be in social assistance – is child care. Child care was really proven in Quebec when they brought in the child care program; the jump in the economy in Quebec for no other reason but there being a child care program. So what have they done? They have cut services in the areas where jobs are going to be created.

That's why they have had to recognize in their budget that there is going to be an increase in unemployment because of the budget. There's

going to be an increase in unemployment for a number of reasons, but this budget is going to contribute 40 to 50 per cent of the increase in unemployment and 40 to 50 per cent of the decrease of our economy.

I still can't figure out, and neither can any economist that I've spoken to – neither can any person in this country who has a thought in their head – figure it out how they think things are going to turn around as they continue down that road. It can't. It won't happen.

They've put their hopes in the price of oil going up again. They actually say that in the budget. That's actually in the budget as well. What is the sign of hope? Not that they have great plans for job creation, it's that they're going to get more revenue because oil is going to go up and there is more exploration.

The point I was making, when I was interrupted some minutes ago, is that it will be great to have revenue coming back to the province if oil goes up to \$50, which is probably the max that it will happen, but we're not going to get a lot of jobs from it. We need jobs, and that's another economic fact.

A main factor in having a good GDP in a province or in a country is employment. Our unemployment is going up. None of that is making sense, Mr. Speaker, and all of that is factual.

I will not have the other side of the House tell me I don't know what I'm talking about. I've spent 40 years as a teacher, as somebody out working in the community with people doing community development, as a researcher in international economics, I'm not going to be told I don't know what I'm talking about. Neither do people who have been writing letters in the paper, sending emails to us, et cetera; neither do they want to be told they don't know what they're talking about.

Let's take one example, the library cuts. I'm sure they're saying oh, no, not again. Well, do you know what? Yes, again because over half of our libraries being closed in rural Newfoundland and Labrador is not acceptable.

There was a wonderful letter on May 4 in *The Telegram*. It came from a person who is a Newfoundlander and Labradorian. I can say the person's name because she signed her name to a letter in *The Telegram*. She currently lives in Germany, but she wrote this letter because she's so upset about the library cuts. Let's listen to somebody else, somebody who knows what she's talking about.

"Library cuts a staggering blow to rural NL. Several years ago I had the great honour and good fortune to work as a Community Access Program IT trainer in a rural Newfoundland public library," – I suspect she's saying rural Newfoundland because it was on the Island of Newfoundland, before somebody jumps up and says she didn't say Labrador as well – "located in a village school building. It was one of the most meaningful experiences of my life.

"I had grown up in a larger urban centre where the library was usually a fairly quiet and deserted place. Here, by contrast, there was always bustle: the local people, and in particular the children, read voraciously. Every lunchtime and after school the children would stampede into the library to choose new books and would often discuss books that they had just read with the librarian or with me. If the librarian had not constantly urged the children to bring books back before taking out new ones, the library's stocks would have been depleted within a week. My impressions have been confirmed by the release of the extremely high circulation figures for this particular library."

She doesn't name the library. She does point out though, at the end of her letter, that the library is one of the ones being closed.

I'd like to point out to the Minister of Education that the library being described here is not from 1896. It's from the last few years. So I don't know when the Minister of Education was talking about: libraries aren't the same, libraries are different. Well, we're talking about a library here in rural Newfoundland, on the Island, in this decade; children rushing to read books, children wanting to read books.

She goes on, "As a result of all this reading of library books, the children had an astounding depth of general knowledge and interest in world

affairs. Notably, the boys were as much involved in the library as the girls, and it kept them actively engaged with their education. For children whose families were unable to provide them with books at home, – “the library filled the gap. Some of these children have demonstrated continuing high academic achievement, as I was delighted to observe last Christmas at the school prize-giving ceremony”

Not last century, last Christmas. These children are some of the highest, academically achieving kids in our province, in a small rural school on the Island with this dynamic library, and this library is being closed.

She goes on and talks about everything else that went on and goes on in that library. You have a program for preschoolers. Apparently, parents come – most likely, I would imagine mothers, because there’s no daycare provision in the village. She keeps calling it the village. “The books on child rearing and child psychology were also extremely well-used. Puppets were available to the children outside of storytime for spontaneous dramatic play.” And she goes on and on.

I encourage people to look up the May 4th *Telegram* article and read all that she says. The end of it, she says – it’s a beautiful letter. I don’t have time to read it all, but at the very end she says, and I’m reading it out for her. “I implore Mr. Ball to reconsider this irresponsible and ill-informed decision –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member that it’s unparliamentary to refer to another Member by name.

MS. MICHAEL: (Inaudible.)

MR. SPEAKER: It’s unparliamentary under any circumstances to refer to another Member by name.

MS. MICHAEL: (Inaudible) when I was quoting from something directly that it was all right. I will repeat –

MR. SPEAKER: I ask the Member to withdraw.

MS. MICHAEL: I implore the Premier – yes, I’m very sorry, I didn’t realize.

I implore the Premier “to reconsider this irresponsible and ill-informed decision – a decision which will undermine the education and ambitions of children living in rural Newfoundland and Labrador.” Isabel Taylor.

I will continue doing this for the rest of the time we have to speak to the budget in the legislation that we have to try to get this government to hear educated, intelligent people with experience from our communities saying to them what the real impact of this is. I implore the Premier to take back this nonsense of the closing of the 54 libraries in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: I’m not sure how long I have to speak to this, Mr. Speaker. I have a minute. Well, let’s see if I can’t condense it down into a minute.

I’m just honoured to be able to stand, and I’ll be sitting very shortly. This was my first opportunity during the Concurrence debate to sit on this side and answer questions. I will get an opportunity to speak to the budget as I will be introducing the main motion back for debate now shortly.

Thanks again for this opportunity.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is that the report of the Social Services Committee be concurred in.

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

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Those against?

Carried.

On motion, Report of Social Services Committee, carried.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAGG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a privilege to get up here this evening and speak on the budget. I only wish I had a little better handwriting.

There are a couple of things I'd like to start off with the budget. One thing that we started off with is why couldn't we be more like Alberta? Alberta has a little debt and we have a lot of it. We had a \$2 billion cheque that was put our way, and that's the easiest way to put it. Alberta has very little debt and we're up to our eyes in debt. We had a \$2 billion cheque that came to us. They put it in the pension plan and then they forgot all about the pension plan until last year. So we have to fix this fiscal crisis and we have to do the job fair.

It was quoted by the Finance Minister a while ago that she's after signing 9,500 mortgages for \$200,000 or more. That's a bit shocking. We have to put a plan in place and we have to do some long-term planning. There's no point to be on a big spending spree when you don't have a lot of money to spend. We're going to try and control that as best we can.

In my district, as everybody knows, it's probably one of the hardest hit districts out there; the loss of seven libraries, two clinics and a school. That's basically because of the overspending and not having the foresight to see a plan for the

future. That has been a big issue for me in my district. Over the next coming days I will have a petition I'm going to present on behalf of one of the clinics and maybe some of the libraries – I know there have been libraries there.

Social media is another thing I'd like to touch on. Social media has encouraged us so much over the last few days how bad this budget was, but a lot of it is getting the message out there. The levy; 38 per cent of our residents will pay nothing on the levy, while 43 per cent will pay less than \$340.

A couple of weeks ago it came up about the fees. I was sitting down with a couple of people and I said how about the fees? They couldn't come up, because I had the full sheet there. The only fees that they could see they were going to be hit every day – as we always hear talk of the low-income people. What fees they're going to have to pay basically would be – the registration and their insurance would be the main fees they were struck with. And on the other thing was the 2 per cent on the HST. So it's not a full 15 per cent on everything, it was just 2 per cent. A lot of people said my driver's licence is a fee, but it's only every five years you have to pay that fee.

People were calling me. They were saying gas, 16½ cents, how are we going to do it? Well, in 2013-2014 gas was \$1.44 a litre. This morning when I checked the pump it was 99.9 here in this city. So the 16½ cents on top of that will still be a lot lower than the \$1.44 that we paid two years ago.

Then we talked about the cost to municipalities. Municipalities can apply for a refund for their gas that they spend; 16½ cents, actually, they can apply for. Plus, they can apply for 100 per cent of the GST on all of their gas sales. So at the end of the day they are not really paying the pump price, they're getting a refund from there.

It's fair to say, yes, in this budget everyone is being taxed. My good friend here from Central talked about it the other day, everyone is taking a burden in this – and we are. Everybody is being taxed on this and that's how it should be. A lot of the times you say that we're taxing the poor and we're not touching the rich.

Anyone who would have read *The Telegram* last week would have seen that 10 per cent of Canada – not only Newfoundland, 10 per cent of Canada – makes over \$80,000. In this province 12 per cent, according to the journalists – 12 per cent of the province pays 54 per cent of the income tax of this province. I'm only basing that on an excerpt from *The Telegram*. So through all that, I think the tax of this – no, it's not great, but it's the best of a bad situation.

I was over to the hospital a couple of weeks ago. I went up to visit my daughter who worked upstairs who, I'll be honest, would rather not say that I'm the MHA for our district right now. Anyway, I went and sat down while I was waiting for my friend. I had a coffee and I sat with this older gentleman. He had no idea in this world who I was, so I said, Sir, how's everything today? I struck up a conversation like I normally would. You wouldn't know I was home, but that was fine.

He said what do you think of the budget? I said it's funny you say that; I'll ask you what do you think of the budget. He said it's that levy, b'y, that gets me. I said, Sir, if someone told you that levy was to keep this place open – and I looked all around the Health Sciences. I don't know if I'm allowed to say Health Sciences or not. I looked all around the hospital where I was and I said, Sir, suppose this levy was to keep this open. He said to me: Young man, I would pay double.

AN HON. MEMBER: Young man?

MR. BRAGG: That's what he said. No, he didn't know how old I was. The man was a bit older than me.

Anyway, through that, I reached out my hand and said: How do you do? I'm the MHA for Fogo Island – Cape Freels. Just like that. So it's perception. Yes, they're getting a lot of mileage out of the levy, but the thing is, if we tell people what the levy is for – it will keep open the hospitals. It will keep open the schools. It will keep the highways going. It will keep our ferries going. It's all the services it will go through.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. BRAGG: Exactly. So we started it off – and I'm off my notes here now.

I have to say, in the beginning I looked at this and I sat here and I was shell-shocked, is the word I would use, when it came out. But the more I'm here the more I understand the need and the urgency of this situation, the magnitude of it all and the importance of us to do the right thing.

It's easy. On Facebook people say vote no. Vote no means you'll sweep the problem under the rug, ignore it and next year it gets worse. I don't think that's what we signed up to do. Someone said it right. If we're only here one term and that's what comes out of one term that we did the right thing, well, you know what? We'll hold our heads high when we walk about the door.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAGG: I looked into the budget and if you look at it, we have \$570 million that can be spent in infrastructure: \$63.7 million on the Trans-Labrador Highway; \$62 million on our provincial roads. Everybody is always asking for pavement. Everybody says: Do you know what will get you elected? Pavement.

Honest to God, someone told me in my district: You do twice as many kilometres of road as what the last MHA did and you're safe to get in again. I said, Sir, how much would I have to do? He said two kilometres. Mr. Speaker, I have a bigger district now so I can only imagine I'm going to have to look for more pavement in a bigger district.

There's \$23 million for the Team Gushue Highway; \$8.13 million for wharfs and terminals. I can tell you right now from where I stand wharfs and terminals and ferry infrastructure are a very important part of my district and for the travel of this province. Here we are now we have a beautiful big boat –

AN HON. MEMBER: Where's she to?

MR. BRAGG: – which is hanging out down at the waterfront. I mean we spent, is it – someone can correct me – \$50 million or maybe \$49.9 million on that boat. Right now we've had no service. For me, for the service that we're

offering right now, if there was no money in the budget we would not be able to have an enhanced crew on the Fogo Island – Change Islands run, we would not be able to provide the service.

So as bad as it is right now, we're moving the people off those islands. That's with a boat that is now half the size of the one that sits idly down to the waterfront. The Minister of Transportation did a little scrum today he told me. He said we were given a lemon to make lemonade. I know where there's a thruster that can stir it up, I can tell you that, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAGG: And it isn't on the run across from Fogo Island to Change Islands, Mr. Speaker.

You look at my district. My district is a fishing district traditionally. I went down last week. I had to go to a graduation so I always leave a little early. I always drop into a different gas station every day when I'm moving to get gas.

There were eight or 10 men in the gas station. I walked in the door and knew what I was facing. They all came and almost rolled up their sleeves, but I was cute enough. I was driving a Honda Civic at the time. I went in and I just parked underneath a couple of the bigger vehicles. So they got in and they told me about how bad this budget was, what should be changed and it was too much, too fast, and they went on. So I gave them their say and I sat back. Now, I said: Gentlemen, you give me a minute of your time and I'll explain to you what I know about this budget that we're doing.

It's a necessity. This budget is not something we have that we're enjoying putting out there. And I said it before; there are no high-fives on this budget. It's a budget of necessity. I explained to him the levy and the importance of the levy, the gas up 16½ cents and where that was all to. I went through the whole gamut of that.

One guy said: I make \$35,000 a year; I'm going to have to pay about \$5,000 extra because of the changes. I said, oh, well you must be making a lot more than that. I said if your light bill is \$300 a month for 36 months, if you do the math on

that, the extra 2 per cent is \$72 on the year. I said that's the most expensive thing that comes into your house. I said I see what you're driving outside, so the 16½ cents in the gas should be of little worry. I said you probably burn more starting your vehicle than I'm going to burn going down to the run.

Anyway, I made light of it and I explained it to him. When I left, each one of them when I went in that door – had this illusion that we were doing this horrible thing – reached out and shook my hand. They said do you know what? You do what you have to do. So I thought it was a good move.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAGG: I'm really glad, actually, that I had the time to sit back from my position back here, sort of elevated over everybody else. Some people might say in the backbench, but it's a great seat to see what goes on and listen.

I'm really glad we've had a month almost now to talk about the budget. It seems like a lot longer than after going all last night. It is the people I talk to – to be honest, everybody's views have changed. It's changed to the point that people are understanding right now. People know what we have to do and see where we have to go.

Someone said everybody is going to leave Newfoundland. Who's going to leave for \$72 on their light bill a month? Nobody that I know of. Who's going to leave for 16 cents on a litre of gas? Nobody that I know of.

Right now and I had it here – I'm a fan of a singer downtown. I wish I could find it, but my papers are gone everywhere. He says in a song: I was born in this place, grew up in this place and here is where I want to be. I think nothing says it better than every one of us that's in this room here this evening, everyone who sits in rural Newfoundland and in urban Newfoundland and wherever they may be, this is where you want to be.

AN HON. MEMBER: And Labrador.

MR. BRAGG: And Labrador, too. I'm sorry. I haven't been to Labrador yet. We'll fix that.

We're making a move here so that we see this longevity for us, for our kids, for our kid's kids and go on down the line. I live in rural Newfoundland; everybody can talk about out-migration and where it's going. We all realize it as the generation gets older.

I grew up in a generation that a lot of us stayed home. From the time I finished school, a lot of everybody in my area have all moved on. Yeah, Fort McMurray fires last week. There's not one person here who didn't know someone who moved to Fort McMurray. They did not move because of the levy or the 15 per cent on the taxes, they moved because they wanted to make a better life for themselves. Some moved out of necessity, but they moved. Some of us stayed where we are.

I drive around rural Newfoundland. It's good and I'm as proud as anybody can see. I look at my district. It's a huge district, no doubt. I look at the businesses in my area. If you come down through Hare Bay there's a fabrication shop and a leather shop. We have a woodworking shop. We have a place for Indian Bay Frozen Foods and Fiberglass Works. The hon. Member for Baie Verte – Springdale was talking about everything in his district, and I took a few notes.

Wood-Pick, smoked salmon and sea urchins; we have Beothic Fish in my area, hiring anywhere from 300 to 400 people directly. I have no idea how many fishermen are in that area. They do crab and groundfish. Crimson Tide, in Dover, they employ 200 to 300 people. We have Hodder's in Stoneville who does sea urchins and the Co-op on Fogo Island that does most anything that comes out of the water. Change Islands, there's a company that does sea cucumbers.

Now, if you add to that, there are numerous grocery stores, hardware stores, banks, two hospitals, cottage hospitals I might add. A brand new one out on Fogo Island and one of the oldest cottage hospitals and well-maintained is the Brookfield Bonnews. Then we have nursing homes and seniors homes.

We have three stadiums in the district: one in Centreville-Wareham-Trinity, one in New-Wes-Valley and another one out on Fogo Island. Numerous walking trails – we have so much.

I've said it for years. I live in an area that has four seasons. You can do anything at any time. There is always something to do.

We have historic sites and homes. There is an old courthouse in Greenspond – excuse me, I was all choked up because I was going back home then – the Barbour site in Newtown. The historic places that are around my area are amazing.

I would not be here wanting to do anything that would damage that in any way, shape or form.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAGG: It's like I said, I was born in Greenspond and I don't want it to be yet, but when the time comes that I have to go, may it be in Greenspond.

Mr. Speaker, it was a great opportunity to stand here this evening. I thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Speaker recognizes the hon. the Member for the District of Placentia West – Bellevue.

MR. BROWNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker,

I can assure Members of the House, I'm far less animated than the Member for Fogo Island – Cape Freels but I share certainly in his passion for Newfoundland and Labrador, in particular, rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BROWNE: I think it's a wonderful place to grow up and live and to stay and raise a family. Someday I'll come to Greenspond to visit the Member.

Mr. Speaker, it's a privilege to rise once again in this hon. House, as it is every time when we rise. But particularly, I'm pleased tonight to rise and speak to the budget which we have now spent a month debating, believe it or not. It feels like it was just yesterday. Actually, it feels like it was a year ago. It's been a great discussion on both sides of the House. I thank all of my hon.

colleagues for their candor and their commentary.

I also want to say thank you, Mr. Speaker, to my constituents. As all Members would know, we were in here until 1 o'clock last night and we were in here fairly late. We start around 1:30 every day, to those watching at home. So it gets fairly difficult when you're trying to return calls to your constituents. It takes a little while to get back to people.

I thank people for their patience and their understanding. Anyone who has written me an email or an inbox message, they've all gotten a reply back. I phoned probably close to 300 people back that have asked me to do so and that I've offered to. I think it's very important that we have that kind of communication with our constituents. I want to thank them for their understanding and their patience.

Speaking now to the Opposition and the Third Party, we may not always agree on a direction for our province, and we may not agree that *Budget 2016* is the right document to move us forward, but I believe each of us comes here to fight for our constituents. I applaud them for their outspoken feedback on behalf of their districts. That's what this process is all about. It's a true honour, certainly, for me to join them here in the House of Assembly.

I'm also here to speak on behalf of my district and my constituents and on behalf of the province as a whole because *Budget 2016* concerns every single one of us. It concerns the people of Marystown, the people of English Harbour East and the people of Bellevue, the people of Monkstown. I met with people from all communities in my district and I've heard their concerns and thoughts about the budget.

Similar to the Member for Fogo Island – Cape Freels, how many people have I sat down with, have I actually gone to their House upon their request, have I ran into at an event, have I spoken to on the phone or replied to an email and they've almost come through the phone at me, Mr. Speaker. But then at the end of the conversation, they have a greater understanding of the measures that we're taking.

In fact, I had one call come to my office from the community of Petit Forte, a lovely, beautiful community, picturesque community on the Burin Peninsula. He was rip roaring through the phone, no doubt, Mr. Speaker. When I asked him to provide me with line 236 on his income tax return and we put it into the income calculator, it turns out he stands to benefit hundreds and hundreds of dollars from this budget. He was very appreciative of that.

I certainly heard my constituents' feedback and I've relayed it to my colleagues in caucus and in this hon. House. The people I talk to, they're frustrated. They're frustrated that we're in this mess. That \$25 billion worth of oil royalties were spent and now we're left in this position, we're a new government, we have to come in and we have to take measures that are extremely unpopular and measures that we don't want to take, Mr. Speaker.

There's no one here on this side of the House, certainly, that would want to bring in a budget like this. I sit behind the Finance Minister; it gave me no pleasure to sit and listen to her 55-minute speech, that's for certain, I tell you. Not because of its length, although brevity is always something I value. But certainly, I can say there are measures in this that are unpopular, that we understand and we want to remedy as soon as we can, as conditions allow.

The people I've been talking to have been waiting a long time for a government to come in and do what needs to be done. After observing over a decade of reckless PC spending, over a decade of short-sighted actions conducted without a guiding long-term plan, people saw this day coming.

We're hearing the negative feedback. No one likes paying more taxes. No government likes raising them. It's a financial strain on an already strained populous. But without implementing the measures that we've taken, we would abandon our province to a debt crisis that could place our current level of services and supports in serious jeopardy.

The situation is bad, Mr. Speaker. There's no getting around that point, but there is hope. I do truly believe there's hope for Newfoundland and Labrador. We are a place abundant of resources,

abundant of people with ingenuity that I believe will lead to brighter futures moving forward. We have hope because we have an opportunity here, Mr. Speaker. It may well be one of our last opportunities, but it's clearly there just waiting for us to take it.

We still have the seeds for success sewn all over our province, from the vast mineral wealth of Labrador to the billions of barrels of oil off our coast. We have a creative population, an increasingly world-class tourism industry, competitive post-secondary institutions and the potential to be once again global leaders in the seafood industry.

We have a strategic location that means we're poised to become a key player in arctic commerce. And for now, we still control our financial destiny but if we falter in this critical moment, then the opportunity may vanish as quickly as the oil revenues did under the PC stewardship, or lack thereof.

Unlike the price of oil, we may never bounce back from that, Mr. Speaker. We are already spending more on servicing the interest of our debt than we are in providing our children with education. This is a point I emphasize everywhere I go, and I've travelled through over two dozen communities in my district since the budget, every weekend. Like so many Members on both sides of the House, we return to our districts and spend the weekends often attending functions and doing meetings with people.

I say to them, yes, it is tough. Yes, this budget is grave, but we are currently spending more on interest payments than on the education system here in this province. That is a very concerning fact, Mr. Speaker, extremely concerning for the future of this province. So I ask Members and I ask the people watching at home to think about that for a second. That is good money heading out of our Treasury and into the pockets of the people who own our debt.

We hear lots of commentary coming from the Opposition about the increased spending this year. Well, a large portion of that was for increased debt-servicing costs because of the inaction and the results of their mismanagement, Mr. Speaker. We don't want to put this province in a position where we are spending more and

more and more on debt servicing. It means it's money we can't spend on roads or bridge repair or putting broadband in communities – which, by the way, we invested \$2 million in this budget for the broadband initiative here in Newfoundland and Labrador. It's money we won't have to invest in our post-secondary institutions or our municipalities.

The interest we owe on our debt has the power to dictate many of the actions we take as a government. If we continue to add the principal of our debt, we run the risk of having our debt-servicing obligations overwhelm us. Imagine if we had to spend more money on interest than we did on health care. We're already spending more on interest than we are on education. Continuing on this path, Mr. Speaker, we would eventually eclipse health care, and that is extremely concerning.

Imagine if our number one concern at budget time was how we are going pay off our creditors rather than supply the necessary and vital services that we do to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Would we be able to provide anywhere near the level of services we provide now if that reality comes to pass? No, Mr. Speaker.

It's basic math – something that the former Finance minister from the other side admittedly wasn't good at, and there's only so much revenue that comes into the province. If we don't have enough revenue coming in to cover our expenditures, then we have to borrow the money. Borrowing the money increases our debt load, meaning our interest payments are even larger.

Having a higher amount of interest shakes the confidence of the people we would borrow from, meaning we would have to borrow at higher interest rates and our debt quite literally, Mr. Speaker, could drag us into a situation where our creditors would own us and the only alternative to that would be bankruptcy. We are committed to making sure that we are never on a path to there. Do any of us want this reality? Absolutely not, and I think that holds true for all Members of this House, no matter of political stripe.

I don't think there's a soul out there who would like to see that happen to our province. There's

not a person in Newfoundland and Labrador who would like to hand our descendants the keys to a province on the verge of repossession by financial institutions. As we have stated, our budget contains the necessary adjustments to our taxation scheme to start the process of preventing this nightmarish scenario from becoming a reality.

We regret that we are in this position, to have burden our people and our constituents with increased taxes and fees – we truly do. Given the choice between sharing around the burden of recovery and allowing Newfoundland and Labrador to become irretrievably burdened with debt, it was a tough decision to make, but the necessary one.

Our budget presents to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and to our creditors a workable plan for returning to surplus in just seven years. The creditors have already responded favourably to this, Mr. Speaker. Seven years may sound like a long time, but considering that the PCs left us with a structural annual deficit of nearly \$3 billion is an incredible accomplishment that we can say that we will be moving this forward to get rid of and erase our debt.

The easy way out, Mr. Speaker, would be to continue on as the PCs had by mortgaging Newfoundland and Labrador's future for the sake of winning political favour. There's no better example of that than the fact that just last year, I believe, there were 19 out of 20 fire trucks put out into PC districts. If we were motivated in the same way that our predecessors were motivated, then that's what we'd be doing. We would be mortgaging our future and we would continue to offer people unsustainable and ill-advised take breaks and giveaways.

Mr. Speaker, as I've said here in the House before, the District of Placentia West – Bellevue is a very big district. It's very large. It encompasses great industrial areas, as I liken it to be the industrial heartland of the Island portion of Newfoundland.

We have the Marystown Shipyard which, Mr. Speaker, as people in my district would know, is facing some difficulty at the moment. I want to inform my constituents that the federal Member

of Parliament and I met with the Marystown town council last week, along with representatives of the union. The Premier will meet along with a working group of the town. We're going to work for the people of Marystown. We're going to make sure that we do our part as a government to bring work to the area because that sustains not only the Burin Peninsula, but the entire province.

We also have Bull Arm, which is operating at peak of over 3,000 people, generating revenue for the province, I should add, not only in taxation but direct revenue. We have Long Harbour with the Vale site there. And, of course, we have the Come By Chance refinery, which is a wonderful example of what a diversified economy looks like – all in my district. We're very proud people and we're very welcoming people. We take people from all parts of the province, employ them and we're very happy to do that.

In addition to these industries that we have I know, certainly, I work with my colleagues – particularly the Member for Burin – Grand Bank who is my neighbour to the south, and we're working as we move forward every day, Mr. Speaker, to bring more industry and more economic development to the Burin Peninsula and to my district that extends onto the Avalon Peninsula as well. This is something we work very hard for and it's on the top priority.

If we were like the Members opposite, we'd continue to ring up the public debt for the sake of approval ratings and short-term electoral favour. And we would squander the fleeting opportunity to halt Newfoundland and Labrador's descent into an inescapable debt crisis. If we were concerned only for our own political survival, like the Progressive Conservatives who came before us, then that is what we would do; and history would remember us as a government that came into power and instead of doing what was right, sat by and let our province's destiny slip through our fingers and into the grip of lending institutions.

I'm proud to say that we will take the less travelled road, Mr. Speaker, and we will make the decisions that are right for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. That does not mean that we are deaf to the concerns of the

people. Every day that I listen to my constituents and hear the concerns they're bringing forward, I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, and the Members of this caucus know that I, along with all my colleagues, we bring forth the concerns that we hear to our caucus, and we are genuinely and actively listening to the people of our districts to make sure that decisions we take as a government, that we respond to them appropriately and we respond to them in time when we can take the measures to correct some of the tougher decisions that we have made here. In due time, we will, Mr. Speaker.

We are asking people to help us take the necessary measures to halt our slide. We ask this because we see the opportunity to bring Newfoundland and Labrador back to prosperity. And it's not some imaginary prosperity, Mr. Speaker, like the kind the PCs sold us; true prosperity like our oil-producing neighbour, Norway, across the Atlantic.

I mentioned before, Mr. Speaker, that there's hope. And I believe if we all join together to get our Treasury back in order, we will be poised to seize a future of unlimited potential. Imagine what we can do with the oil revenues when we diminish our debt servicing obligations to a manageable level. Those revenues will return. It's more or less a market certainty.

If we have control of our debt load, then we will no longer have to use these resource revenues as collateral when that day comes. We will be able to harness them to shape the future that we want for ourselves and for our people and our constituents. It isn't a hypothetical future, Mr. Speaker, that's predicated on the type of wishful thinking that got us into this mess, as the Member for St. John's Centre said today that we're banking on oil – it's not true at all. This is a future that we can ensure for our people. And if we take the steps today that will get our financial affairs in order, it will bear fruits for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Before I finish up, Mr. Speaker, I want to comment on some of the commentaries that have been made here tonight about the lack of hope. I believe there is hope, and I believe there's a lot to stay here in Newfoundland and Labrador for. I spoke at the Tricentia Academy graduation in Arnold's Cove on Friday night, and I said to the

graduates – these were all 18 year olds about to embark upon going into the workforce.

MS. DEMPSTER: (Inaudible.)

MR. BROWNE: Not far off my age, the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair reminds me.

They're about to embark upon going into post-secondary or into the workforce. I said to them, there's a lot of negativity out there – some of it unfounded, in my opinion. There's a lot of negativity. And now as young people entering into the workforce and into society in a new stage in their lives, it's up to them now to cut through that negativity and find a path forward. There is a path forward here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I hear Members opposite say the young people will go. Well, as a young person myself, I see ample opportunity here and I see lots of reasons to stay right here in rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BROWNE: I would suggest: What legacy are we leaving the young people of this province by kicking the can down the road and leaving them mountains of debt, Mr. Speaker? These are tough decisions, but necessary ones, given the mismanagement the former government made.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BROWNE: This budget is a blueprint for the future. Although it is tough, although it is hard, Mr. Speaker, we as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have to pull together, we have to come through this and we will come through this. There is a light at the end of the tunnel, but it requires us to come together and pull together.

We've come through rough patches before. When we work together, when we collaborate, we are stronger. I do not see the point of spreading negativity for its own sake. I believe there is fear out there because it's being promoted to be there. I think if we collectively and resoundingly join together, we can come through this. We will come through this; I am convinced that we will.

For all the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, whether you are young or old, rich or poor, we will work through this together. We will be a government that represents all people. We will be there to listen and to serve because this is truly, as the Member said, the people's House where we do the people's work. This government will listen and we will respond.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Speaker recognizes the hon. the Member for Virginia Waters – Pleasantville.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

I'd first of all like to say I'm not as elegant a speaker as the Member for the District of Fogo Island – Cape Freels. He did an excellent job and I'd just like to say congratulations on that.

I'm pleased to stand here in this hon. House as the representative for the Virginia Waters – Pleasantville District. The situation that we've been faced with this budget is difficult at best, no doubt, in relation to the previous mismanagement by our previous administration. The budget, while it's difficult to deal with, is our best –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Speaker wants to remind all hon. Members that there have been several warnings given. It was said earlier by the other Speaker that if this persisted, we would be naming Members and they would not be recognized tonight and they would not be recognized tomorrow to ask questions or to answer them.

This is the final warning. If there is one more outburst, that's what's going to happen.

I recognize the hon. the Member for the District of Virginia Waters – Pleasantville.

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

This budget, while it's a difficult one, is our best shot to try to right this financial ship that we've been left with. I've heard the concerns of my constituents and expressed them to our government Members with respect to several issues, the temporary Deficit Reduction Levy being one.

No one likes the situation that we've been placed in. I brought these concerns forward on numerous occasions and we're trying to work through those. But let us not forget that the reason why we instituted this temporary levy was a direct reflection of the financial disaster that was left to us by this previous administration.

Let's take a second to talk about this temporary levy. Mr. Speaker, 38 per cent of the taxpayers will not pay any of the temporary levy and almost 43 per cent of the people will pay less than \$340 per year on this levy.

Let's be clear, the hon. Member for Cape St. Francis last week mentioned that the temporary levy was based on income. I wanted to clarify that it's based on after-tax income so people can understand that if someone is making \$30,000 in gross income, that's not necessarily what they take home. I just wanted to make sure that the hon. Member for Cape St. Francis understands that because there was a little clarity problem last week.

The hon. Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi talks about us not taking care of our seniors and low-income individuals and families. So I just want to take a second and go through some of the things our government has put in place to bolster this area in our province, to help these most vulnerable populations.

We have announced approximately \$3.5 million to support the placement of select individuals with enhanced care needs in personal care homes; \$250,000 towards starting a new seniors' advocate office. This is not a luxury, like the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune says it

is. I believe the seniors' advocate will help identify ways to better assist seniors and face the reality of providing the best possible care we can to this aging population.

There is an additional \$300,000 to the Seniors Resource Centre to enhance information and referral systems; \$300,000 for age-friendly transportation services; \$100,000 in support to continue development of age-friendly communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. These measures will go a long way towards ensuring some of the seniors in our community are protected during these tough economic times.

So I ask the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi, is this not support for seniors and low income? Is it enough? Absolutely not. But given the horrendous financial situation we've been given, this is a great start.

One of the policies that I'm most excited about is our homes-first policy that encourages support to let seniors age at home, where they are not only more comfortable, both physically and emotionally, but it also gives us an opportunity to allow people to receive the best possible care where and when they need it.

Another measure that will work specifically to protect seniors in these tough economic times is the \$12.5 million investment that our government has ensured to the enhanced Seniors' Benefit. This will give seniors a steady, reliable income that will help them contribute more to society.

We must also protect those low-income earners and families who struggle to make ends meet. That is why we've created the Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement. We have an obligation to put in place revenue measures that address the deficit, but we also have to ensure that the most vulnerable in our society are protected and helped.

The NLIS will come into effect on July 1, around the same time as the revenue measures outlined in the budget will come into effect. The first quarterly payments will be disbursed in October, and that will be a double payment. This supplement will be automatically applied to individuals whose income tax is below the

threshold of \$40,000. The only requirement is that they have to file their income tax. This will greatly reduce the stress of having to navigate through additional red tape in the system.

Mr. Speaker, two features in our plan to stabilize the economy are diversification and selling government lands to raise revenue. The Department of Transportation and Works is working hard on this file with the Real Estate Optimization Plan. Once we have this plan, we will determine the parcels of land and buildings that are best assets for our government to divest and find opportunities to sell. This plan has to be done correctly for the long-term viability of this process and we're going to do that.

As I've mentioned previously, already in my district there are opportunities coming forward to look at developing farming operations which will bring much-needed revenues to our province as well as employment. In my district in Virginia Waters – Pleasantville, you don't think of farming when you come to that district for sure. There are lots of other areas in the province that have a lot better situations for farming, but there are a couple of areas in my district that are great opportunities for farming operations and we're looking at a couple of those. Some people have come forward looking for that.

Increasing the number of farming operations in our province makes good sense for a lot of reasons. Obviously it helps diversify and strengthen the economy, but also to shore up food security, which is always an issue when you live on an island like we do. Mr. Speaker, while streamlining this process may take some time, I'm confident that we can facilitate some innovative, excellent projects in my district in the near future.

The Leader of the Opposition mentioned that the Rowan Centre program was closed. This is true. But the program only served 65 people in the entirety of 2015. Simply put, the resources were very underutilized. Those resources, including 2½ full-time equivalent positions, will be redeployed to better help the people struggling with mental health and addictions issues in our region.

I take great exception to the comments that the Leader of the Opposition made. He had the opportunity to make these changes, but decided not to. He and his party chose to kick the bill to the kids. We, and I, are not prepared to do that. Tough decisions needed to be made and his former government never had the intestinal fortitude to do what was necessary.

Mr. Speaker, we have had numerous requests from the Third Party to have dealt with our budget the exact same way as Alberta did their budget. They seem to think that Alberta dealt with their budget better.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. B. DAVIS: Several economists have come forward. Ron Kneebone, an economist at the University of Calgary said, and I quote: “Newfoundland’s interpretation of the fall in the oil price is that oil not going to come back any time soon.”

“So rather than accumulate a whole bunch of debt, waiting, hoping, praying that oil prices will come back, they decided to take action to close the deficit.” Alberta, the NDP’s province –

AN HON. MEMBER: It was an economist, right?

MR. B. DAVIS: An economist said this: “Alberta seems to be deciding to do the opposite.” When you have decided to do that, are oil prices going to come back any time soon? There’s a very high risk when you take that chance.

Robert Kavcic, a senior economist for BMO, said also: There’s zero appetite for Newfoundland’s debt. The budget makes Newfoundland’s bonds more saleable. It makes economic sense from their standpoint. I’m not economist, but that’s two economists.

Mr. Speaker, I’d also like to take a second to speak about Virginia Park Elementary. It’s in my district. It’s one of the major projects that we’re doing that’s going to change the outlook of this schooling in the district. I’ve held meetings upon meetings with the people in the

district, the stakeholders, the school councils, the Department of Education, obviously the Department of Transportation and Works, as well as the school council there and the parents and teachers. It’s important that we keep an open dialogue going. That’s one of the things that was lacking in the previous administration with this project.

This project obviously was very difficult from the start. It’s done on the former dump site for the American base and obviously there are a lot of issues that came along with it that drives costs up. We want to ensure, Mr. Speaker, that the school is safe for the children. That’s why we’ve put the due diligence in place and we’re going through this process of making sure they’re involved in every aspect, step by step.

So we’re very close to that right now. The tenders went out; we’re getting close to having a bid awarded. I just want to ensure to the people in the community that we’re going to make sure this project is a great thing for the future of our community and make sure that our kids have that safe opportunity to get a great education.

They already have great teachers, faculty and staff down there and they get great outcomes. What we want to do now is give them the building to match their capabilities, so it will give an opportunity to succeed even further. I know the hon. Member that used to represent that district before will agree with that statement for sure.

I’d just like to clue up there now. I’m excited to see the continual progress of this project. I want to address a statement made by the Leader of the Opposition who mentioned that our budget went up. That, again, is true. He should know; his government is the reason for the increase. The increase is related directly to debt-servicing costs incurred by the previous administration and payments directly to the Teachers’ Pension Plan. These are both decisions that they made and were caused by failure for them to plan. We need to look at this for the future.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm happy to stand here this evening in this House of Assembly and speak to the main motion of this budget. I was hoping to speak to Concurrence earlier, but fortunately, or unfortunately, we had so many people that wanted to speak that I was unable to. But I am happy to be able to stand here and speak again to *Budget 2016*.

The first thing I would like say is that during the Concurrence, that would have been a good opportunity to discuss the Estimates process that we went through with the Department of Justice we did here one evening. I think it might have been a Wednesday. Certainly, the Leader of the Official Opposition was there, the Member for St. John's Centre was there, and I thought it was a good session actually in terms of Estimates.

I've been on that side asking questions. I've had some very good sessions and I've had some that weren't so good in terms of answers. I tried my best to provide every answer I could. Certainly, I had some conversations with Members who said that in terms of back and forth, they thought it was productive, so I appreciate that. And I have to thank the staff that was with me at that time because they make up this department. They are the people who make the department go around. I certainly think I might be interchangeable. I could be taken out, but we still have a very strong core for the Department of Justice and I'm very happy to be a part of that.

Now, speaking to the main motion of the budget, certainly there's been a significant amount of debate over this. The budget was brought down April 14; we're here now over a month later speaking to it, going through the regular routine of any budget. The fact is that there's been a significant amount of debate, commentary, questions and issues with this budget, as there should be.

This budget is not the same as many of the budgets that we've seen from the previous administration. I guess there's a similarity in that there's a deficit, but there's not a similarity in

the fact that – in this case, this budget was driven, in many ways, by the choices that we wanted to make, but certainly by the choices that were made by a previous administration.

I will point out the irony that many Members on the other side have stood up and said, well, they talk about what we did and talk about the future – they talk about what we did. But I was over on that other side when I heard about Liberal decisions in the '90s and Liberal decisions in 2003. In fact, I heard many Members on that side say since 2004.

I think I heard one Member opposite say, you can't have it both ways and you can't speak out of both sides of your mouth. I say, you're saying it right there. One minute you stand up and you can't be blamed for everything you did in the past. Then, the next minute you stand up and you defend those decisions that you made.

One of the pieces of commentary that they put forward was what shouldn't we have done. There are a number of things that I don't think we, or I, would have done. It adds up. I think the Member behind me for Baie Verte – Green Bay said earlier you start with \$50,000, you start with \$10,000 and a million dollars, it all counts and it all adds up.

One of the things they talk about – and I've heard some criticism of the process. I don't think there's anything wrong with scrutinizing every department, looking at it. One of the things that we did notice was the significant amount of government public money spent on advertising. The amazing part that I really noticed was how in some departments the amount spent in last year's budget, the budget leading up to an election, actually doubled. They doubled their communications budget in an election year and they're proud of that. That's one of the things that I would not have done.

I want to talk about the Department of Justice and Public Safety because that is the department which I'm happy to represent on behalf of the Premier. I want to respond to some of the comments by the Leader of the Official Opposition or the former premier or whatever the term is. The fact is he is the Justice critic as well. He's made some commentary tonight and

in the House during Question Period and I want to respond to that.

He says: What wouldn't you have done? One of the things that I probably wouldn't have done is I probably wouldn't have ignored the courthouse in Harbour Grace. I probably wouldn't have let it rot to a state where it's actually a hazard and you couldn't actually go in there. It's hazardous to people.

I wouldn't have allowed the historic courthouse in Harbour Grace to rot and be dilapidated and unavailable for use by our Provincial Court. Let it rot to the point where it actually requires multi-millions to fix. That's what I wouldn't have done.

Now, that's some of the stuff I wouldn't – it's funny because the Member opposite takes the opportunity to stand up sometimes and say this is what they should do. I say, you worry about the decisions you made and worry about the decisions you make on that side. I don't think you have to worry about what decisions we're going to make on this side, including all of our Members, it doesn't matter who you are.

One of the points he said was, well, the Member for Harbour Grace – Port de Grave brought in a petition about the courthouse. He said, you brought in a petition, but you're going to support the budget so that's a contradiction.

I say two things to that. Number one, we're all elected on behalf of our constituents here. We have to do what we think is in the best interests of our constituents. So if a Member wants to bring forward a petition and present it here in the House of Assembly on behalf of their constituents, then that's what you're doing. That's your job.

Now, it's not going to be like the past where I know Members on the opposite side got petitions but those petitions, I don't know, they might have went in the shredder, they might have went in a cupboard somewhere, but they certainly didn't get presented. So I have no problem with the Member bringing a petition.

We've had a significant number of meetings since that time. She's not happy. Do you know what? Neither am I. I don't like the fact that we

were presented with tough choices that we had to make. They say you can't blame us. Yes, we can. We can certainly blame you. Do you know what? We formed government December 14 and it was only a few months before that – the Premier spoke about it earlier today – \$900 million deficit projected. That was the deficit that was projected when this crowd went and had their negotiations with the independent tribunal on judges. Now, that's something I'll get to in a second as well, but these are the numbers they had.

Of course when we get in and we actually look at the books, it's almost triple that. So I don't know if that's just not knowing the difference, if it's incompetence, not wanting to put the information out there. I just say it is what it is. We take over and this is what we have. So do you know what? Yes, you can certainly share in some of the blame.

I've got to digress for just a second, because it reminds me – the Member opposite actually said tonight, well, if you're in such difficult times, why are you doing this, why are you doing that? I think you might have been talking about full-day kindergarten. If you're in such difficult times – again, as if he doesn't know that we are, because he put us there.

I can't take credit, but it reminds me of a story I just read recently. In the story – actually it was a politician that took over a very similar situation to us. The politician took over a huge deficit and, again, getting some blame for that and having to make difficult choices based on that. This was actually around 2008-2009.

This crowd is saying, well, they would have us go back and do the same things that they did. They would go back and question the policies. So here we are – and in this story he talks about how basically he is there with the mop. We're all busy with the mop. We're mopping up the mess that was left to us. The crowd that created the mess is over on the side saying, you're mopping up too fast. Oh, no, you're not mopping up quick enough; hold the mop differently.

So I would say to the other side, pick up the mop and help us clean up the mess that you left us.

That's what I would say to the Members on the other side.

That's the funny part here is the crowd that created the mess sits back and criticizes the steps that you have to take and they put you in that situation. Actually, that's a story from an American politician. In that case it was President Obama took over from the significant financial mess left by previous administrations to him, whether it was Bush. So in that case, it was amazing when I read it, and it just struck me. My God, there were such similarities to what we're dealing with here.

Now, I'm going to go back again to the courthouse in Harbour Grace, because I've got to correct – some of the issues that I have here, again, I have no problem. I've been on the Opposition side. I know they're going to put forward concerns. I know they're hearing it. So have I. We've all heard it. There's no doubt about that.

Some of the problem too is that the Members opposite put out information that's just factually incorrect. I have to go back to Question Period today where the Leader of the Official Opposition, the former premier, talking about the courthouse in Harbour Grace saying it services 80,000 people – 80,000 people. That's wrong – that's wrong. That information is incorrect. So I'm going to say, if you're going to put out some information, just try to make it factually correct. Please do us that favour.

Again, I have no problem with asking a question, that's a fair point; but if you're going to ask the question, stick to the facts when you do that. He's not isolated in that because we've seen that from multiple Members on the other side when they ask questions – multiple Members.

We've had questions about the courthouse in Harbour Grace. Do you know what? I unfortunately don't like the decision, but I've had meetings with the mayors. I've had conversations with solicitors. I've had meetings with the MHAs and we're going to continue to talk to them. We're going to continue to talk to the judiciary. We have to continue to figure out these issues.

The Member opposite doesn't like when I bring up the fact that he did very similar things just a couple years back. In fact, in 2013, what they did to the Department of Justice was absolutely amazing.

The other side, too, that I haven't heard much of is that there were some good things announced in this budget when it comes to Justice and Public Safety. One of them is the significant investment in the Family Court here in St. John's. We know that caseload is growing. We're going to put the money into the infrastructure to ensure that we can accommodate this.

There's money going to go into a review of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. That's a very sad story we all heard. Actually, I was dealing with it just after Christmas where we had some issues. It is issues that we've seen persisted over time. These are issues that you inherit.

It's funny actually, I go back to a great interview I heard this evening with the Minister of Transportation whose frustration, I think, is showing when he's talking about the problems that he inherited that he has to deal with. I think he has done it with a tremendous amount of class and work ethic in handling these problems, taking what was left, talking about the boats that were bought and the significant overruns putting in the docking system, I think it is.

It's a decision that was made. We see what the results are and here we are dealing with it. Do you know what? That's what we wanted. We wanted an opportunity to deal with these issues. We wanted an opportunity to come in and to right the wrongs. Come in and fix a lot of the mistakes we have seen over the past 12 years.

Now, the unfortunate part is that in many cases – it's funny because they mentioned the fact of the deficit and about taxing and spending. The leaders of both Opposition parties are on the record in the last six months saying they would have done the same thing. No, they would only do the popular taxes. They wouldn't have made any bad cuts.

That's on the record. The Leader of the NDP, the Leader of the Official Opposition, they say

the same thing. They would have had to do it. They talked about the plan – well, I can't get into that plan because we saw that plan. The plan was outdated within months because it was based on faulty information.

Going back to it, they want to talk about people that you hear from. The fact is, yeah, we've had to make some decisions that are certainly tough and are certainly unpopular. At the same time, I've heard from some people. In fact, it was shortly after the budget that I went to a fireman's ball down in Margaree, a local service district in my community. You go down, people were expressing their concern over it and I've been speaking to people. So when I went down to this, you don't know what you're going to expect.

Actually, the first person I walked up to – he came up – I didn't know what I was going to get. He came up and he grabbed me by the hand. He said: Thank God somebody had the guts to do it. That's what he said to me. He said: All I'm hoping is that when you get this righted, when you fix this, don't forget us, the people of this province. That's who we don't want to forget. We don't want to forget the people of this province that are making these decisions.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. A. PARSONS: We don't want to forget the children that will grow up and will inherit what is left to them. We want to do what is right to make sure they are left with something that is better than what was left to us. That's what we would like to do.

The fact is that this is a budget that we had to make a lot of difficult decisions. But I'm willing to say that even if they're tough, I think the benefits will be seen over the long run. Sometimes we don't talk about it, but there are a significant amount of good things in this budget.

I've heard the term "austerity" tossed out. But as the Member for Cape St. Francis tossed out tonight, he said, you guys spent. And we did. There was a significant amount of spending in this budget; \$8.4 billion if I'm correct. I might be off a little bit, but I think that's the number. There was a significant amount of spending.

I know the Minister of Municipal Affairs has gone out and worked with his federal counterparts and worked with his department. I think the number I've got is \$570 million –

AN HON. MEMBER: It's \$350 million (inaudible) \$575 million infrastructure.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, \$575 million in infrastructure spending. Do you know what?

AN HON. MEMBER: And \$350 million Municipal Affairs.

MR. A. PARSONS: And \$350 million in Municipal Affairs. That's a significant amount of money that's going to go into communities to provide the infrastructure and services, to provide jobs. These are the things that are happening. In fact, I'm happy to see this because my district has been Liberal for some time and we've done without.

In fact, it was only last year that I think the biggest municipality in my district, Port aux Basques, got the grand total for capital works of zero dollars.

AN HON. MEMBER: What?

MR. A. PARSONS: Zero dollars.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. A. PARSONS: The fact is do you know what? Right now I'm happy to see that there will be infrastructure investment in my district, in districts on both sides of the House of Assembly, because decisions had to be made that are in the best interests of people regardless of political stripe.

The Minister of Transportation is going to make sure again – there was a politician once that used to say about taking the politics out of pavement. I don't know who that politician was, but that's what he's done.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible) fire trucks.

MR. A. PARSONS: I'm not even going to talk about fire trucks. I'll leave that to the Minister of

Municipal Affairs to talk about fire trucks, but the fact is we are seeing investment. We're seeing investment in roadwork. We have the Burgeo road which in December of 2014 collapsed.

AN HON. MEMBER: What?

MR. A. PARSONS: It actually collapsed. Now, unfortunately I stand here, it's May of 2016, and that road is still collapsed. It was not fixed. I know direction was provided to say fix this because this is a health hazard, and for whatever reason previous ministers didn't want it done. So I'll leave it to previous ministers of Transportation and Works to talk about why that bridge – one where an employee of Transportation and Works almost died in that accident.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. A. PARSONS: Actually, I just got a message from him last night talking about the treatment he's still going through and he's hoping to get back to work again next year. That's not fixed, but I'm glad to see that work is going to be done this year. It's going to be done. It's going to be starting, hopefully, in the next month.

I'm going to see investment in health care. Every Member here has had an opportunity to talk about their district. Did we all see what we wanted? You better believe we didn't, but we did see investment because we have to continue to have investment, and that's what's going to happen in this budget.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to say that I'm looking forward to standing here this year talking to this budget and speaking to next year's budget and the ones after as we move forward in providing a brighter path, one that we were not on the right track for with the previous government. The fact is that sometimes you have to have these budgets which are not popular, but which are necessary steps. It's a correction to previous administrations and making sure that we do the right thing.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to stand here and speak to this budget.

To conclude, I would also say now given the hour of the evening, I would move, seconded by the Minister of Natural Resources, that this House do now adjourn.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Those against?

This House now stands adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, being Private Members' Day, at 2 o'clock.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, at 2 p.m.