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Speaker: Honourable Tom Osborne, MHA

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MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

While I don't see them, I've been asked to welcome Tim Thorne and Tim Turner to the public gallery today. They are with the Murphy Centre, which is the subject of a Ministerial Statement this afternoon.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: For Members' statements today we have the Members for the District of Harbour Grace – Port de Grave, Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune, Conception Bay South, St. George's – Humber, St. John's Centre and Baie Verte – Green Bay.

The hon. the Member for Harbour Grace – Port de Grave.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

It is with pride that I stand here today to recognize my friend and local artist, who you may have heard of, Bobbi Pike of Spaniard's Bay. Inspired by our scenic province and our people, Bobbi pours her memories and experiences onto canvass, creating her own version of the rock.

Newfoundland artist and now the author of the province's first adult colouring book, which is entitled *The Colours of Newfoundland and Labrador*, with her black and white sketches, she invites us to colour the coves, communities and small moments of daily Newfoundland life.

Bobbi's talent is world renowned. Her artwork can be found hanging in homes, galleries and businesses throughout Canada, the United States, Australia, Denmark, Sweden, Bangladesh, Germany and the United Kingdom.

Something interesting, in each of Bobbi's paintings you will find three crows. Some are easy to see and some are hidden in the scenery.

The reason: Nicknames were developed in communities throughout Conception Bay North to distinguish families with the last surname. Bobbi's maiden name is Seymour, and the nickname is crow. Rumour has it that the first Spaniard's Bay constable was a Seymour. He was often seen patrolling the lanes and drungs, wearing a long, black cape and he became the first crow.

Colleagues, please join me in honouring hometown Spaniard's Bay girl, Bobbi Pike.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise to deliver accolades to Mr. John Kendell who has shown tremendous fundraising initiative through Cycling for Cancer, which has raised over \$50,000 to assist local cancer patients in my area.

This July marks the 17th Annual Bay d'Espoir Cancer Benefit, where all residents band together to reinsure that cancer patients have access to funding and support. Through the efforts of volunteers such as John, this public fund has raised over \$1 million since 1999, a true testimony of our unified fight against cancer.

Today, we thank and commend Mr. Kendell for his tremendous dedication which embodies the Benefit's spirit of giving and caring. John is an inspiration to all of us in our shared commitment of "People Helping People." For nine years, he has led the Cycling for Cancer ride down Route 360 and his group's triumphant entrance to open the Benefit sparks the uplifting mood and spirit of generosity which carries throughout the entire event.

I ask all Members of this hon. House to applaud Mr. Kendell and I encourage him to continue giving so whole-heartedly to his community. I also encourage more cyclists to join John on his ride this year and wish them great success in their fundraising effort.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and celebrate the incredible contributions of our volunteers. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have a rich history of volunteering and community involvement. They are on the front lines of all our community services from health care, disaster relief, volunteer firefighting, minor sports – the list is endless.

The work of the volunteer is essential work and is the backbone of our communities. These individuals, who give freely of their time through organizations or on their own, provide a foundation upon which the communities can grow and prosper. In turn, these stronger communities help build a more vibrant province and this can be seen in Newfoundland and Labrador, more specifically in the Town of Conception Bay South where I recently attended the annual Volunteer Appreciation Ceremony at the Manuels River Hibernia Interpretation Centre just last week along with the MHA for the District of Topsail – Paradise.

I want to thank each and every volunteer who has given their time and talent to make our communities a better place to live. Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members to join me in thanking all volunteers in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. REID: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize two recent recipients of the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association awards for their work as educators.

Rob Matthews, from Massey Drive, is this year's winner of the Barnes Award from the NLTA. The Barnes Award is named after Dr. Arthur Barnes, Newfoundland and Labrador's first Education minister who in 1928 initiated a number of teacher conferences to promote

excellence in education. The award was established in 1987 to recognize outstanding professional development service provided by teachers at the special interest council level. Matthews has been in the profession for 25 years and has spent most of that time as a school administrator.

The other winner from the Corner Brook area was Katherine Rowsell, a learning resource teacher at Corner Brook Regional High School. She is this year's winner of the Bancroft Award, recognizing outstanding service at the branch level of the NLTA. Katherine has been involved with the Humber branch of the NLTA since 1989 and she has filled a number of positions in that time.

I ask all Members of the House to join with me in congratulating these award winning educators.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm so happy to celebrate one of our brightest literary lights. Megan Gail Coles is no stranger to either readers or awards panels, and she's having another large year.

In February, Megan was named winner of the 2015 ReLit Award for Short Fiction. If the hon. Members have had the pleasure of reading her book, *Eating Habits of the Chronically Lonesome*, they will understand how well-deserved this award and all the others it has won really are.

Her short story collection also earned Megan last year's BMO Winterset Award, the Margaret and John Savage First Book Award and one of five of the Writers' Trust of Canada's Five x Five award.

In 2013 she won the Rhonda Payne Theatre Award, recognizing her as an emerging female theatre artist. Her dramatic script *Grace* was a

Senior Division winner at this year's Arts and Letters Awards.

Megan is a finalist for this year's ArtsNL CBC Emerging Artist Award, to be presented May 28.

Bravo, Megan Gail Coles for all you have done, continue to do and will do for our vibrant literary community. We are so proud of you. We are so proud of her.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. WARR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House to recognize the accomplishments of a team of remarkable young women from my district.

A group of 12 girls from a number of high schools on the Baie Verte Peninsula joined together to form the Baie Verte Emerald, the first club volleyball team from the Peninsula. While most of the girls were inexperienced at playing the sport of volleyball, you wouldn't know it at the Under-18 Girls Provincial Volleyball Championships that took place in April.

At that tournament, the girls overcame a rocky start to deliver a blazing performance in the semifinals and finals to clinch the championship. It was the first provincial volleyball championship for the area in such a long time.

The Baie Verte Emerald team members are: Tamara Jacobs, Vanessa Cosh, Michaela Shiner, Theresa Walsh, Kristin Budgell, Jamie Walsh, Mackenzie Andrews, Katie Knight, Kailey Gillingham, Abby Robins, Crystal Sacrey and Chelsea Ward. They are coached by Marc Toms, Ryan Saunders and Hayley Shave.

They are the pride of the Peninsula, and a credit to the great District of Baie Verte – Green Bay.

I ask all Members to join me in congratulating the Baie Verte Emerald for their championship victory.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. SPEAKER: For Honour 100 today, we have the Member for the District of Mount Pearl North.

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Lest we forget: Francis O'Toole, Norman A. Outerbridge, Richard Owen, Walter Oxford, Patrick Palfrey, George Richard Pardy, Augustus Percival Park, Cecil Parmiter, Norman Parmiter, John Richard Parrell, Patrick Parrell, John Parson, Aubrey L. Parsons, Bertram C. Parsons, Charles Albert Parsons, Charles H. Parsons, Harry Parsons, Pierce Parsons, William Parsons, William Thomas Parsons, William W. Patey, Reginald J. Paul, Stephen J. Paul, Frank Payne, Naaman Payne, Stephen Payne, Archibald W. Peach, Henry W. Peach, Josiah Wesley Peach, William H. Peach, Hector Pearce, Samuel R. Pearce, Jacob Pearcey, Edward Peckford, Alec Peddle, Eli Peddle, Richard Peddle, Clarence Pelley, Cornelius Pender, Charles Pennell.

We will remember them.

(Moment of silence.)

MR. SPEAKER: Please be seated.

Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today in this hon. House to speak about the recent Council of Atlantic Premiers meeting that took place yesterday, May 16, in Annapolis Royal, Nova Scotia.

The main agenda topics discussed included strengthening the region's economy, improving health care, enhancing energy co-operation and addressing climate change.

Mr. Speaker, our dialogue around strengthening the economy focused on population growth and workforce development as well as reducing red tape and barriers to business in the region to support economic growth. Premiers also discussed working together to expand access to high-speed Internet, particularly in rural areas.

It is important to highlight that with respect to climate change, Atlantic Canada is leading the nation in mitigating the impacts of climate change and our efforts will assist in reducing greenhouse gas emissions in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, health care was also top of mind with a focus on patient-centered care and improved health outcomes. Premiers discussed federal health funding allocations and the need to consider cost drivers such as demographics and prevalence of chronic disease in future enhancements to health care transfers.

I am pleased to highlight that the Atlantic Provinces are moving forward with joint procurement of anesthesia and ultrasound equipment. The estimated savings are approximately \$6.1 million over the next three years, with more savings to be realized in coming years as governments work together to identify further joint purchasing opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, I was glad to participate in this productive meeting and to put forward the interests of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I thank the Premier for an advance copy of his statement today. We know co-operation amongst Atlantic premiers is important and benefits can certainly be born of these relationships. I do, however, find it interesting that the Premier's discussions focused heavily on strengthening the economy and population growth, certainly in stark contrast to the Liberal budget we've seen here in this province, the one that has smothered our economy, devastated our residents and shattered business confidence.

Hopefully, the Premier was able to borrow some good ideas from his counterparts in Atlantic Canada. The fact is people in this province see our government's budget as a population growth strategy. Unfortunately, it's not one for Newfoundland and Labrador; it's one for the rest of Canada because a lot of our residents are going to leave here and head to other provinces. We know the other premiers will certainly benefit from that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I thank the Premier for the advance copy of his statement. I note the premiers discussed the federal health transfers, but I would have liked to have heard a strong call from them urging the federal government to move to a formula that doesn't hurt provinces with small and aging populations. We're waiting too long for this.

The discussion about strengthening the economy is rather ironic when this government is doing everything to weaken our economy and create barriers to business and jobs.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources.

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, I rise today in this hon. House to highlight our government's support for mineral prospectors in this province

and to inform residents of ongoing registration for the upcoming Prospectors Training Course.

The provincial government is partnering again this year with the College of the North Atlantic to offer the course, which qualifies those who complete the program for a Genuine Prospector designation under the province's *Mineral Act*. A Genuine Prospector can stake up to 30 claims a year without having to pay a security deposit.

The Prospectors Training Course is intensive and field oriented and provides training in prospecting and sampling methods, rock and mineral identification, basic geology and mineral deposit types. This year's course is being held at Bay St. George campus in Stephenville from May 30 to June 10. Applications are being accepted up to May 23, and I invite anyone who has a keen interest in prospecting to find more information on the Department of Natural Resources website.

By encouraging prospectors, our government is providing a basis for future mineral development. We support the mining sector through such areas as prospector training and mentoring, the Mineral Incentives Program, public geoscience, the core storage program, promotions and efficient and transparent regulation.

The mineral industry employs over 7,000 people in this province, a majority of them in rural areas, and there is significant investment in exploration, development and mine operations.

We are committed to achieving long-term sustainability in the mining industry. The Prospectors Training Course supports this goal by providing educational opportunities to encourage growth and development in the mining sector.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for the advance copy of her statement today. I, too, would like to bring attention to the upcoming prospectors training course and to encourage individuals with an interest in mineral development to register for the course.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to thank the program partner, the College of the North Atlantic, for offering the course again this year. This program has been educating prospectors for over two decades and interest in the program continues to grow.

We believe that investments in this program will lead to a brighter future for the mining industry in our province and there's lots of potential. However, I'd like to take a moment to note that it's been some time since the minister has given the people of the province an update on mining activity in the province, especially on activity in Labrador. So while the minister says that government is committed to achieving long-term sustainability in the industry, I respectfully challenge her to outline what actions she's taken since coming into office to support this commitment.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, thank the minister for the advance copy of her statement. It's good news that the program is being offered again. I hope as many people as possible will take advantage of this course. I also hope women will be encouraged to participate and that the minister has ensured resources are in place to encourage women into this typically male-dominated profession.

We are enthusiastic about the mining industry but it must be sustainable both socioeconomically and environmentally and must bring solid benefits to all the people of the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to acknowledge the important work of the Murphy Centre.

The Murphy Centre was originally established in 1986 in response to youth whose educational needs were not being met in the traditional classroom setting. From the high school credit program, personal development and career services, to the Adult Basic Education program, this centre helps young people reach their academic goals and prepares them for future employment opportunities.

Last week, I had the pleasure of visiting the centre to meet with staff, students and teachers to discuss the centre's various programs and achievements over the past year.

From the time you walk into the Murphy Centre you become a part of the community. The compassion and interest in a student's development and achievement was evident in every teacher I spoke with.

We don't always know the life experiences that impact and shape a student's life. This September, the Murphy Centre will celebrate its 30th anniversary. I am very pleased that the provincial government continues to support the centre which provides alternative ways for our students to learn.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. I, too, would like to extend my congratulations to the Murphy Centre on their 30th anniversary. They continue to provide valuable education service to the students as part of a community.

I had the privilege some 30 years ago to be part of the opening of the Murphy Centre and have

seen first-hand over the last number of decades the great work they do and how they are a community when it comes to creative ways of providing education to people who have some challenges.

I, too, particularly would like to acknowledge the two Tims, the captains at the helm of the Murphy Centre, Tim Turner and Tim Thorne, who for decades have guided the Murphy Centre to where it is today.

On behalf of the Opposition, congratulations, and we wish them many more years of educating our young people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I, too, thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. I'm delighted to congratulate the Murphy Centre on the 30 years of helping so many young people, including many who have gone on to achieve major academic career and life goals.

The Murphy Centre has proven time and again that alternative learning methods are of great value. Given its success, I ask government to actively encourage similar learning centres, with the Murphy Centre as a model, to operate in other areas of the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign just a few short months ago, one of the Premier's many promises made was to turn an \$8 million economic development investment into \$78 million this year. He promised to sell government assets to raise \$50 million.

I ask the Premier, if taxing and fees is the only new generation of revenue that this government will create. If not, when will you reveal your new revenue generation plan?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The election platform was one that we put out there. Of course, we still see significant opportunity within assets around our province that were future assets that really do not deliver any services to the people of our province right now.

It's important we get an assessment of where these assets would be, and in many situations work with communities because they could actually take advantage of some of the opportunities that would see in their communities to use these retired assets. In some cases it's just a matter of reducing the cost. That is a savings for the current government.

Unfortunately, what we've seen from the prior administration, they continued to ignore the stranded value or the cost that was costing our government for many, many years. Many of these empty buildings are sitting in many communities in our province right now that could add benefit to communities, but is no longer a benefit to government.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

So I guess the \$8 million plan, the investment to create \$78 million, is off the table and there is no other new revenue generation. We know there are only two options: one is to generate revenue

and the other one is to reduce programs and expenses. We know we have another budget coming the fall.

I ask the Premier: Your plan still continues, I would think, to cut jobs this fall. When are you going to come clean with the public servants of Newfoundland and Labrador and let them know what's in their future?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's interesting today that the former premier mentions the two options that you have, either to increase revenue or reduce programs or costs, as he mentioned, within government. It's unfortunate that he did not do a better job of that and just pretend the last 10, 12 years of his administration didn't exist, because that's what we've seen right now. The failure to actually plan and manage for the future of our province leaves us in the situation that we're in today.

The commitment that we've made to public sector workers, we stand firm to this, is to negotiate in good-faith bargaining. We value our public sector workers for the work that they do in supplying critical services to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Again, we have no answer from the Premier. Premier, economists are suggesting that to meet your Liberal target budget amounts and your promises from last year's campaign that substantial reductions in programs will have to occur.

If you won't tell me what the impact will be on public servants, maybe you'll take some time to explain what programs you intend on reducing and cutting further in the fall budget coming up.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Interesting the former premier mentions about plans and so on and how we would pay for those. In his own election platform just a few months ago that he said earlier, they had this long-term care strategy, as he called it, to put services in place in Newfoundland and Labrador. When you look for the budget figure on that cost, it was kind of cost neutral.

Well, I guess it would be very difficult to understand if you had a program and it would be cost neutral. Who, indeed, was going to be making the donation to actually provide the operations of that?

So these are some of the shortfalls that we've seen from the previous administration. For us, it is still good-faith bargaining, a fair negotiating process for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians with our public sector unions.

It seems to me the former premier would want us to negotiate in the public. That is something that we are not prepared to do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Well the question was about programs, not about public servants, and the Premier still refuses to answer.

People stop me every single day, and they say: Why is it they won't answer a question you ask in the House of Assembly? They never do it. They never provide an answer, and we're seeing it again here today, Mr. Speaker.

I will try this with the Premier. Yesterday, the President of the Canadian Bar Association for Newfoundland and Labrador – when referring to court closures – said, “Closure of such courts works to undermine access to justice for residents of this province, and in particular the most vulnerable and impoverished residents”

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier: If you're making decisions based on evidence and listening, why are you closing the courts when there's so much evidence saying you shouldn't do so?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

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

I'm happy to stand here and speak to this. Certainly, I did receive correspondence from the local president of the Canadian Bar Association. In fact, I'm looking forward to having a chat with them very soon to discuss this.

Again, as the representatives for lawyers in this province, I would certainly expect that they are going to contact us and talk about legal services and courts closing. I would expect no less.

The fact is we have to make very tough decisions. They are certainly not decisions that I like having to make but we have to make tough decisions based on the situation we find ourselves in.

It's not something that the Member opposite likes to bring up, but the fact is he actually closed circuit courts in many parts of rural Newfoundland when his government was in power.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

So the Minister of Justice and Public Safety rises and criticizes us for closing courts, and what does he do instead of fixing it? He closes more, Mr. Speaker. That's what we get from Members opposite. They dig deeper. He said what we did was wrong and he does even more of it. That's what their answer is over there.

Mr. Speaker, I will ask the Premier this, or maybe the Minister of Justice will answer on his

behalf again. Because people are going to be challenged in travelling the long distances to court – I'm told there are about 80,000. I think one of the Members behind you quoted, I think, 80,000 citizens utilize the court in Harbour Grace.

What programs and supports will you provide to the people who are going to be challenged with the need for transportation back and forth to St. John's to avail of court services? What programs and services will you provide for them?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

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

Certainly the first thing I would suggest to the Member opposite is that he at least get his math right because the number is certainly nowhere near 80,000. In fact, if this is the kind of inaccurate information that the Member opposite is going to put out, unfortunately this is going to do nothing but cause more fear amongst the public.

The fact is we've had to make difficult decisions but, unfortunately, they are not decisions that we haven't seen elsewhere. There are many individuals in this province that have to travel tremendous distances to appear in court whether it's at a provincial or Supreme Court level, people on the West Coast, people in Central. That's not something that we like. It's not something that I'm sitting here saying we need more of but the fact is we have to make difficult decisions.

When it comes to Harbour Grace the bigger decision is why was this historic courthouse left to rot and be placed in a dilapidated situation where it requires a fix of \$5 million to \$10 million?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

We're just quoting from Members on your own side of the House, I say to the minister, in information that we're hearing that they are sharing with their own constituents. In fact, Members in the back row have tried petitioning their own government, but the voters from their districts are wondering: Are the MHAs actually advocating for them or are they doing it just for show?

Now, just yesterday the MHA for Harbour Grace – Port de Grave, on plans to close the Harbour Grace courthouse, stated in the media that the facts are there, is what she said. Thousands of people in this region come through the doors of the courthouse annually.

So if you won't listen to the people, you won't listen to anything we have to say or ask, will you listen to your own Members?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, the fact is that many of our Members – and I don't think anybody is happy with a lot of the decisions that we've been forced to make, faced with the situation left to us by the former premier and his government.

The fact is we encourage these things. In fact, I encourage the Member to continue to work for that. I've had a number of conversations with her and a number of conversations with the mayor of that community. The fact is I don't expect them to like this situation, but we encourage them to put forward their views as opposed to the Opposition who, when they were in government, stifled any dissent. However, I did see one petition during Bill 42 that was signed by their own staffers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Well, I look forward to the budget vote to see if they are standing with their people or with their government opposite.

We know the Canadian Bar Association has written the minister. We know a group of lawyers from that region have written and expressed serious concerns with the closure of the Harbour Grace courthouse in particular. It is not about the building; it's about the service provided to the people and access to justice provided to people.

He just said himself mayors are having difficulties with it and his own Members, his own MHAs, are saying it's wrong; it's not the right thing to do.

If you want to be a listening government, you say you're going to respond to what people say, Premier, why is it you're not listening to people when they're very concerned about the delivery of justice in that area?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I think that one of the things that Member opposite forgets is that in order to have access to justice, you do need a physical structure in which to have the court. The problem we're faced with in Harbour Grace is that the historic courthouse was left to rot and requires a fix of \$5 million to \$10 million. We are forced then to accommodate another building at a cost of \$300,000 per year, which is just an extraordinary amount of money when looking at the other situation we're placed in.

In fact, I've been in touch with our Members and everybody else to say, look, we're always willing to listen to solutions to fix these problems. Of course I'm going to hear from lawyers in that area. This is something that is going to affect them and their clients.

Again, I look forward to having a meeting with that crowd as well to listen to their views, hear

what they have to say and always work towards finding a better way forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We are hearing from many library users and librarians that the process used to select which libraries will be closed was flawed. Users in rural areas are baffled as to why their well-utilized libraries are now slated for closure.

Can the Minister of Education table the evidence used to select which libraries will close?

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

MR. KIRBY: Yes, Mr. Speaker, the board that was appointed by the previous government and, I guess, selected in other means across the province made this decision based on empirical evidence. We recognize, along with the board, that the libraries of tomorrow are different than the libraries that we've had in the past. That's why the board decided to move to a regional model as part of the Government Renewal Initiative.

If the Member has any questions – he has not contacted me, to date – I will provide him with a response, as I have, with single member of the public who has contacted me about this to date.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, the minister continues to blame the volunteer board. I spoke to the library board and was told that they were presented with five scenarios by the department and that government – through the removal of funds – forced the library board to select the best of the worst scenarios.

Can the minister confirm that this is true?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, I can confirm that is not true. As part of the Government Renewal Initiative all departments, agencies, boards and commissions of government were asked in January to find up to 30 per cent savings because of the fiscal cliff that we going over as a result of the wasteful spending of the government that was here previous to this one.

As a result of that process, the Provincial Information and Library Resources Board submitted four presentations to government – the Provincial Information and Library Resources Board submitted four presentations to government, one of them was about the closure of somewhere in the order of 70 community libraries. The officials in the department worked to refine the fifth proposal.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: I make note to the minister that it was his department who forced the libraries board to use a process that was good for them. The president of the Newfoundland Federation of School Councils stated in the media that full-day kindergarten shouldn't be rushed through at the expense of the education of older children.

Mr. Speaker, the Liberals have no trouble tossing away other promises they made. Why are they pushing through now on the backs of older children?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador is the last province in Canada to implement a full day of kindergarten. We are the last province in Canada to implement a full day of kindergarten.

Last week, we had three people come to the province from British Columbia, from Ontario, from Nova Scotia to do professional development with senior administrators in the province about the benefits of full-day kindergarten. We have talked about the research here at length. I won't recite all of that because I really don't have enough time in my response. However, we are going to be ready for this program in September and have made significant investment in it thus far. It makes absolutely no sense, considering the return on investment, to reverse direction now.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Apparently only the minister thinks that this is the right move at this time.

Instead of increasing class cap sizes, introducing combined classrooms and reducing intensive core French, I ask the minister: Will you consider postponing the implementation of all-day kindergarten?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, I encourage the Member opposite to read the weekend *The Telegram* on a regular basis. There was an editorial or – there was an opinion piece in there last weekend at around 300 or 400 words from Dr. David Philpott, who's an expert in early learning and special education and affiliated with the Jimmy Pratt Foundation. It's a local philanthropic organization that has been advocating for better early learning and care for years. Also by Margaret Norrie McCain who is with the Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation, another philanthropic organization that has pushed the previous government into implementing full-day kindergarten.

There are plenty of voices in favour of it. I get emails on a regular basis and calls from people who want to move ahead. So I don't know why the Member wants to pull the rug out from under their feet.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: I guess when the time is right I'll share the tens of thousands that I get about people who are saying we shouldn't move forward right now with that – tens of thousands.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: We'll have a good debate come budget time.

This past Saturday, I attended a large rally at Riverside Elementary. It was organized by parents and students upset with the recent decision to axe the planned expansion of the school.

Why was that much-needed project axed by the Liberals? Parents, students, teachers, even the local MHA want to know the answer.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: I'll tell you the answer, Mr. Speaker. Despite having access to some \$25 billion in oil and other royalties and income, the previous government waited until they were on their way out the door last year to announce several hundred million dollars' worth of infrastructure.

Now I don't know why modular classrooms are no longer suitable to the Official Opposition because during the time that they were in government, actually over the past six years at a cost of about \$18 million to \$20 million they employed – they put in 41 modular classrooms at schools across the province.

Holy Trinity Elementary in Torbay has eight modular classrooms and I never heard the Member for Cape St. Francis ever say a word about that being a bad direction to go in.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, obviously I need to clarify to the minister that modular classrooms are a good tool but in our administration we built 38 new schools. We renovated 42 other ones to ensure people –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: – had the proper learning environment, Mr. Speaker.

The MHA for Terra Nova is now writing me to find out the status of work completed on Riverside Elementary.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: Can the minister advise the House of Assembly and his own caucus Members, what work has been undertaken to support renovations to Riverside Elementary prior to taking office in December?

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, I could report that the previous administration did very little work on preparing for the extension to Riverside Elementary – very little work. I would say that it was such a pressing issue, why is it they waited until the dying days of their administration to do something?

As I said before, modular classrooms were used over a period of six years by the previous administration. They put in 42 modular classrooms. Villanova Junior High had five put in; Paradise Elementary had four put in; Dorset Collegiate had four put in, and I could go on and on about this. With the five modulars that are going to be added to Riverside Elementary, we don't see there being any school capacity issues in terms of enrolment going up to 2021. After that, the pressure is even less, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Again, Mr. Speaker, I'll explain to the minister that the modular classrooms while necessary were a temporary fix. We were moving forward to enhance learning and the environment for students to learn productively.

Five schools are slated for closure, three have had construction delayed and three have construction deferred indefinitely.

I ask the minister: How do you expect thousands of our students to continue in overcrowded schools while various educational programs are being cancelled due to lack of space?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: It is interesting that the Member opposite gets up and talks about overcrowded schools. I was at a public meeting in Portugal Cove-St. Philip's just over a year ago where that Member guaranteed parents, teachers and students in Portugal Cove-St. Philip's that the new school they promised for years was going to be ready for this September.

Well, that Member was minister of Transportation and Works. As a result of his incompetence in that position, that school is not going to be ready for this September; in fact, it will not be ready for another full year. Then he has the gall to stand up and complain about overcrowding.

You should have done something about it when you were over here. Don't complain about it now.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: I'm asking all Members of the House, when a Member is stood and recognized to speak that we respect that Member's right to speak. Both sides of the House, I'm asking again today to respect the Member that's stood and recognized to speak.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, the Premier sent out a news release with other Atlantic premiers talking about economic growth. Here at home, the Liberal budget will grind our provincial economy to a halt.

I ask the Premier: How can you suggest that you're focused on growing the economy when your budget does the opposite?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm sure the former deputy premier would know that if he went back over his own budget documents for several years now, you would see that the trending in terms of the economy in our province – all the economic indicators were pointing downward for this period of time. It's unfortunate that the former deputy premier did not plan for where we are today because in the anticipated deficit that we are – oil, which is what they built their whole administration on, it would have to be at \$148 a barrel to actually get us to a balanced budget right now.

There are extreme difficulties and fiscal challenges that we're facing within this province. I would just wish that we were in a situation today that there had been better planning for the economy in our province. I can assure you right now that we will put corrective measures in place and we will get the economy of Newfoundland and Labrador back on the right track.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, we had a plan and we were honest about it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: We grew the economy while his budget will shrink the economy of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, the Premier has been in office for almost six months. All we hear are vague statements. All we see are broken promises.

I ask the Premier: What specifically has his government done to diversify and grow our economy?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, it seems to me the former deputy premier wants to stand by his own economic plan for the future of our province. As an example, one year ago they were predicting the deficit in our province would have been just shy of \$900 million.

In actual fact, as a result of the work of their administration, which was dreadful at its best, and I can assure you now would have gotten a failing grade by anyone who would have assessed it, we would have been not a \$900 million deficit but, indeed, it would have been a \$2.7 billion deficit.

I would ask the former deputy premier when he stands up again: Is he satisfied with a \$2.7 billion deficit, asking future generations to pay for the things we enjoy today? Is that still his position?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: I'll tell the Premier what I'm not satisfied with. I'm not satisfied with his lack of leadership, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: His budget will shrink the economy. His budget will drive young people away from Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: His budget will drive people in this province into poverty.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: I ask the Premier: When will you start taking responsibility and showing leadership? Where is your economic plan?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First and foremost, we have to make responsible decisions. Something the former deputy premier did not do. Accept responsibility for your own actions and stop pretending that the last 10 or 12 years didn't exist under your administration.

We are taking corrective measures today. It starts with getting your own fiscal house in order. It's something we had to do. We've had to make some tough decisions, Mr. Speaker, I would say. We know that and we understand that, but you can never create an economy, never get your economy back on track, first and foremost you have to get your own financial house in order. That is the corrective measures we've taken. In doing so, we've protected seniors in our province, low-income earners in our province and the most vulnerable.

We will continue to do that. We will work with the business community in our province to make sure we do have a strong economic future.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, lots of blame and no plan.

The Atlantic premiers talked about the importance of population growth in growing our economy. The recent budget in this province will shrink our economy and drive young people away.

So what is our government doing to support growth in this region? Is the Premier actually supporting his Atlantic colleagues by driving people out of our province and into theirs? Is that part of his plan, or does he have a plan at all for the economy, Mr. Speaker?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, in Budget 2016-2017, there are significant investments that would create many hundreds of jobs in Newfoundland and Labrador – infrastructure investments, nearly \$570 million worth of infrastructure investments over multi-years. We've worked with many associations within our communities that actually drive much of the work that occurs there. This creates economic activity. Mr. Speaker, in doing so, we will always protect the most vulnerable in our province.

Full-day kindergarten is another example of investments that we are making in young families in Newfoundland and Labrador. So inside this budget, there are certainly many different things that will actually spur the economy and create economic growth; infrastructure spending is just one of those.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, is the Premier actually suggesting that this budget which will grind our economy to a halt, is he actually suggesting that it's going to grow the economy?

For 10 years we grew the economy. Now, six months in, the Premier continues to demonstrate that he has no plan and he has taken no action.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. KENT: He won't answer my question, Mr. Speaker, so I'll ask him again: What is your plan to grow the economy in Newfoundland and Labrador? You've had six months, still no plan.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well the former deputy premier talks about the last six months and no plan. What we saw for 12 years was one plan, single focus, nothing but oil. Once oil fell off and the production declined and price declined, the economy stalled. The economy was brought to its knees.

What they see for the future of Newfoundland and Labrador is continue to borrow, create debt and let debt be the second biggest industry in our province. That's their administration. That was their plan; continue to borrow so the next generation will pay for the benefits that he wants to enjoy today.

Ask your kids how much are they prepared to pay on your behalf, I'd say, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Before I recognize the hon. the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi – I'm not cutting into her time; they will get their five minutes. The level of noise in the Legislature during question and answer period is not acceptable. I've allowed some chirping back and forth, without loud or continuous heckling. I'm getting to the point that that is going to be cut out completely as well.

If I can't hear the speaker who is recognized to speak myself, neither can anybody else.

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

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

This government promised to take politics out of government appointments to agencies, boards and commissions, but last night in debate on Bill 1, the *Independent Appointments Commission Act*, this same government voted against an amendment that would have seen the commission selected by an all-party committee of the House rather than by Cabinet.

I ask the Premier: How does keeping control of the makeup of the commission in Cabinet's own hands lead to the less partisan system they promised?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Independent Appointments Commission that will be established in Newfoundland and Labrador, I think is a great step forward in putting people, individuals, in Newfoundland and Labrador that are merit-based, has the technical experience, to help make the decisions that we must make in Newfoundland and Labrador. These appointments, which are really something that we have never seen in our province before – as you know, prior administrations, even some NDP administrations that we see in other provinces, have not taken the proactive measures that we've taken to put in place.

What you will see here is there will be a resolution with the commission's names that will come to this House. They will debate it here and then the committee will be put in place. We will use our Public Service Commission; unlike we've seen in this Legislature or in this province any time in the past.

So I'm looking forward to seeing some fantastic names, and I encourage all Members in this House to reach out into the community, engage Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in some important work that needs to be done in our province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I ask the Premier: How does a body that merely makes non-binding recommendations to Cabinet or to a particular minister and is itself selected by Cabinet be named an Independent Appointments Commission?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: As I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, the self-selection that the Member refers to – actually, the names will come through a resolution in this House of Assembly here and then she will have the opportunity to have her say.

I'm suggesting – and I will predict something – that she will actually support and endorse those names. I think she'll be very proud and when she's asked by the media to respond to this, I believe that the Member opposite will be supporting those names. That's what I'm suggesting right now and predicting.

Added to that, the people that will be serving those boards, we will be reporting to the House of Assembly on the people that would be doing the work that is required and we are going to be asking them to do. I think that it would be very fair to the individuals that she may know that would be interested – I would suggest that you go out and get those people in Newfoundland and Labrador that can add that valuable contribution which is required.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I ask the Premier: What process will we use; they would not vote for an all-party committee, so we aren't allowed to tell them who to put on the commission.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think there's probably a step in the process that the Member opposite has forgotten about: the Public Service Commission. Resumes and people that are interested will feed into the

Public Service Commission. They will be screened and based on the experience and the technical ability that they would have to be part of some of our valuable boards and agencies that we would have in our province, then that would be taken to the commission that I am sure the Member opposite will be supporting in the next few weeks.

With that, the names will be selected and the Independent Appointments Commission, we will use that process. We will put some great people in Newfoundland and Labrador, people that we have not seen. It will not be based on political patronage, as the Member opposite is suggesting, but we will have Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in the right place doing the great work that I'm sure they're interested in doing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women: Did she ask the Women's Policy Office to analyze and apply a gender lens to Bill 1, An Act to Establish an Independent Appointments Commission. If so, will she table that report?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, as the minister responsible for the Women's Policy Office, I can assure the Member opposite that office was engaged in the construction of the legislation that we debated in this House last night. I'm very proud of the work that has been done by that office.

I'm even prouder of the fact that, from an operational perspective, we've already begun conversations with important stakeholders to make sure that the opportunity for women to participate in the Independent Appointments Commission process is one that is taken advantage of by every woman in this province that wants to do that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS as a result of *Budget 2016*, X-ray services at the Bonavista Peninsula Community Health Centre will be closed after 4 p.m. until 8 a.m.; and

WHEREAS this will mean that anyone needing an X-ray after 4 p.m. will have to travel elsewhere via ambulance; and

WHEREAS as a result of *Budget 2016*, laundry services will also be cut resulting in laundry being transferred to St. John's;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to immediately direct Eastern Health to reverse cuts to X-ray and laundry services at the Bonavista Peninsula Community Health Centre.

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

Mr. Speaker, we're hearing from concerned people right across Newfoundland and Labrador. I've been hearing a lot from people on the Bonavista Peninsula. Today's petition is signed by residents of Port Union, Bonavista and Catalina. They're very concerned about cuts, not only to health services but to other services in the region as well.

In fact, there's a story in the media today featuring a community activist who is so concerned about cuts to the AES office that she used her own vehicles to block the doors of the office. It's a sign of desperation, Mr. Speaker.

People feel they're not being heard. They're not being listened to. They don't have a voice. So we will do our best to ensure people, no matter where they live in the province, no matter what district they find themselves in, that they do have a voice.

Specifically to the health services, there are many concerns being expressed by residents of the Bonavista Peninsula. One resident wrote me and feels that physicians will no longer want to come here to work, with no diagnostic testing available on evenings and weekends. Locum physicians will also be reluctant to come here during physician shortages.

Nurses are already working tremendous amounts of overtime and extra hours. The lack of X-ray services will result in increased workload with transfers to other facilities, usually double time for travel, increase stress for nurses monitoring patients who do not have a diagnosis. It's a major patient safety issue. X-rays are used to rule out many different types of potentially life-threatening conditions. This will affect Port Rexton, Trinity, the Southern Bay down to Bonavista.

Mr. Speaker, people have real concerns. They want answers on how any of this will actually save money and they want answers on how it will impact their safety and their lives on the Bonavista Peninsula.

I'm pleased to have the opportunity to raise these concerns in the House of Assembly on behalf of those residents.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Once again, Mr. Speaker, I bring another load of petitions into the House that have been sent in by people who are just absolutely, totally concerned about what's going to happen to them when all the different measures that are in *Budget 2016* are put in place, the levy being one of the big ones that really concerns them.

As I've said before in this House, whether it's people who are here in St. John's, people who are in Wabush, Labrador, people who are down the Southern Shore, from all over the province I

have petitions today, Mr. Speaker. These people are really worried, both about and about others. Low-income people and low middle-income people are going to be severely hit by this budget, and government continues to refuse to recognize what's going to happen.

Middle-income people have proven to us that they are going to be losing a good \$3,000 to \$4,000 from their pocket. Money they don't have, Mr. Speaker. They are concerned also about people who are lower than they are. People who are living on \$20,000 a year and less do not have any extra money in their pockets, Mr. Speaker, to pay the rise in the HST, to pay another 18.5 cents on every litre of gas that goes into their automobiles.

We're going to see a rise, Mr. Speaker, in people lined up for food banks in this province. I hope this government will be happy when they see more people lined up for food banks in this province. If the Premier likes to say – to me when he stands on his feet – I'll be happy with what they come up with, the commission. I'm going to tell him, I'm not going to be happy when we see what happens with this budget.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today I present a petition to the hon. House of Assembly in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in Parliament assembled, the petition of the undersigned residents of Newfoundland and Labrador humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS our province's seniors deserve quality care and assistance when residing in long-term care facilities; and

WHEREAS our province is currently experiencing an escalating shortage of long-term care beds;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to explore all options, including partnerships, to create new long-term care beds in the province.

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

Mr. Speaker, I guess this is an issue that's been talked about at great length over the last number of years. Everyone knows long-term care is one of the biggest issues facing our seniors in the province. As we all know, we have an aging population. Seniors have been a great topic of discussion.

The previous government made great strides toward trying to deal with the long-term care shortage in the province by moving forward on some new strategies and creating more long-term care beds; but, as we know, the current government decided to go another route which we've yet to see the alternate plan outside of closing Masonic Park.

Mr. Speaker, seniors need our attention. They are asking for us to speak up for them, which is what we're doing here now. Long-term care is a real issue. Sound bites are great but action is better.

The closure of Masonic Park is – even though a net gain, net loss. We're being told there was no loss in beds but regardless, the beds that were lost at Masonic Park are still lost through the system.

When you have our hospitals being occupied now by seniors waiting to get into a long-term care home, it is a real issue, Mr. Speaker. I deal with it in my own district. I have several heartbreaking stories of seniors trying to get into homes, trying to get with their spouse. We have a real shortage.

We're still waiting on the current government to follow through on some of their commitments. As I said before, you live in hope and die in despair, but I hope it is a hopeful thought.

We need to find ways to make progress. Find new innovative ways to deal with the real issue being experienced by real people in this province, Mr. Speaker, and they are seniors.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

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

WHEREAS government has once again cut the libraries budget, forcing the closure of 54 libraries; and

WHEREAS libraries are often the backbone of their communities, especially for those with little access to government services where they offer learning opportunities and computer access; and

WHEREAS libraries and librarians are critical in efforts to improve the province's literacy levels which are among the lowest in Canada; and

WHEREAS already strapped municipalities are not in a position to take over the operation and costs of libraries;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to keep these libraries open and work on a long-term plan to strengthen the library system.

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

I think, Mr. Speaker, our celebrated writer Kevin Major probably, most accurately in one line summed up the reaction of the people of the province to this announcement of library closures. He wrote: Today I was humiliated by my government.

I believe that is an accurate reflection of how so many people feel because people can't grasp – how can they do this? To what end? Really, to what end has government done this? What do we get from it? It's a movement that actually impoverishes the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Some people talked about feeling like Newfoundland and Labrador has been made a

laughing stock. We've heard from the Faculty of English at Memorial University, academics. We're hearing from people who use the libraries. It's not just about the most disadvantaged, the most vulnerable people; it's about all the people of the province.

If we can't afford to keep our libraries open, what is this all about? To what end? We know we have the lowest literacy level in the whole country. We know that people use our libraries in our communities. In some of our communities, the libraries are sort of the heart of the community. People use them as meeting places. People use them to enhance their literacy. People use them for library access.

The ones on this side, the Official Opposition, already had closed a number of community access offices. So already people were reeling from that, and now to close our libraries with no consultation. Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador said there was absolutely no consultation with them. This is a regressive move backwards.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS the people of Bell Island deserve to have access to services that will assist them to gain employment and education; and

WHEREAS these services have provided proven results to the people of our province; and

WHEREAS decisions made in this budget by the current government have removed the Advanced Education and Skills office from Bell Island;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to

reinstate the office of Advanced Education and Skills on Bell Island.

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

Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege over my career, for a number of years working in the management field, of going back to Bell Island, my hometown, to work in the AES office.

I think a little bit of history for people when it comes to the importance of the AES office. Coming from a community that was a one-industry town, a very vibrant one, the second largest populace in the province next to St. John's, and in the '60s when that all fell apart, obviously, people who were based on a particular skill, a lot of it around labour intensive work, had to concentrate then – if there was no employment in this province at the time. In the mid to late '60s things weren't exactly booming in this province. People were stuck there with minimal education levels and minimal ability to gainfully find employment. So they had to rely on Income Support and social services of the day.

That office was integral over the last 40 years of giving people a hand up – and not a hand out – of finding ways to better engage the citizens, give them access to upgrading their education. The Adult Basic Education program – going back 30 years when the college system still existed there, before it was cut by a former Liberal administration – was very important in giving people the ability to get their high school equivalency, but also to get a trade.

Next to CONA at the time, or CNA campus here in St. John's, Bell Island had the largest campus. Five hundred students would go there every year from all over the province. It gave an opportunity for those who were on Income Support to be assessed and provided services.

As we move forward over the next generations, we found a different way of engaging people. The old days of the make-work projects – the make-work projects were important because it gave people a sense of pride; it gave them an ability to give something back to the community. Most of our communities were enhanced by the investments we did. It also got

people into a routine of figuring I'd like to be able to go to another level, either upgrade my education or find some enhancement around employment.

The AES office as we know it now has evolved to a point where it's a support mechanism for people who come there, single parents who come there, older workers who come there, young people who have struggled in the school system and those who want to get back into the workforce. That process has been used to support people. Taking that away right now is detrimental to rural Newfoundland and Labrador and particularly Bell Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I call Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

MR. A. PARSONS: I would call from the Order Paper, Motion 16, I would move, pursuant to Standing Order 11, that the House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. today, Tuesday, May 17.

Motion 17, I would move, pursuant to Standing Order 11, that the House not adjourn at 10 p.m. today, Tuesday, May 17.

Mr. Speaker, I would move, seconded by the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills, for leave to introduce a bill, an act entitled, An Act To Amend The College Act, 1996, Bill 29, and I further move the said bill be now read the first time.

MR. SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded by the hon. the Government House Leader that Bill 29, An Act To Amend The College Act, 1996, be now read a first time.

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

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Those against?

Carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills to introduce a bill, "An Act To Amend The College Act, 1996," carried. (Bill 29)

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The College Act, 1996. (Bill 29)

MR. SPEAKER: Bill 29 has now been read a first time.

When shall the said bill be read a second time?

MR. A. PARSONS: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 29 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, Mr. Speaker, at this point I would call Order 4, second reading of Bill 27.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today, I'm here speaking to Bill 27, which is An Act to Amend the Law Respecting Statutory Offices of the House of Assembly.

I would move this, seconded by the Minister of Natural Resources.

MR. SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that Bill 27, An Act To Amend The Law Respecting Statutory Offices Of The House Of Assembly, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act To Amend The Law Respecting Statutory Offices Of The House Of Assembly." (Bill 27)

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

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

I'm getting ahead of myself here today. It's almost like we had a late night here or something. I am standing here to speak to Bill 27, An Act to Amend the Law Respecting Statutory Offices of the House of Assembly.

I guess the precursor to this – this, in many ways, is a companion piece of sorts. As we all know we debated Bill 1 which has now passed third reading for the Independent Appointments Commission, which is a commission now which will govern all bodies, agencies and commissions in this province. That includes what we call our statutory offices here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

We have six. We have the Auditor General, which is pursuant to the *Auditor General Act*; the Citizens' Representative, which falls under the *Citizens' Representative Act*; the Child and Youth Advocate under the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*; the Information and Privacy Commissioner, which falls under ATIPPA, 2015; the Chief Electoral Officer, which falls under the *Elections Act, 1991*; and the Commissioner of Legislative Standards, which falls under the *House of Assembly Act*. I would point out that number five and six are the same individual.

The fact is that we have these statutory offices, and I don't think I need to get into a very lengthy debate about the importance of each one of these offices which have all evolved over the passage of time. For instance, when you talk about our Information and Privacy Commissioner – in fact, in doing this, I went back and looked into a bit of the history. The Information and Privacy Commissioner actually came to place back in 2003. Actually the first commissioner was a gentleman named Wayne Mitchell who actually came into place prior to the act being enforced. So in the grand scheme of things, we are not talking about a significant amount of time when it comes to that particular piece of legislation or officer.

When we talk about our Commissioner for Legislative Standards and our Chief Electoral Officer, that's an office that's been in place since 1993, a bit longer history. The Citizens'

Representative is an office that's been around since 2002 and the Child and Youth Advocate is an office that's been around since also 2002.

Finally, the Auditor General is an office that's actually been around – our first Auditor General was started in 1898. So in terms of seniority, the Auditor General would be at the top of the list.

Now each of these offices has a very important role. I guess if we want to talk about them in layman's terms, the Information and Privacy Commissioner obviously – and we've heard a lot about this office, especially over the last number of years. They deal with the right of access to information for people but also the protection of people's privacy when it comes to release of said information.

The Commissioner for Legislative Standards and Chief Electoral Officer, this is the individual that handles elections in the province but also ensures that all Members follow – and again, we swear an oath and we have rules that we need to follow and these are handled by this individual. I will point out that that individual is a gentleman named Mr. Victor Powers who actually is moving on and has given his notice to retire.

We wish him well and thank him for his service to this province. He has done that role actually since 2011. It has been just about five years in that position and it is a significant term. That's an office that there will be a vacancy in very shortly.

The Citizens' Representative, we've had three individuals doing that role and actually that's held now by a gentleman named Mr. Barry Fleming. The Citizens' Representative is an ombudsman whose role is to represent citizens when it comes to issues of – that can fall under just about anything.

Every year their report is actually tabled here in the House. I always take an opportunity to read the report and talk about issues that are brought forward by citizens in this province where they feel they may be aggrieved or have issues that are not being addressed properly, whether it's a case of discrimination, they haven't been treated properly.

Again there's a process in place where complaints come in, they're investigated and, in some cases, the commissioner does a report. It's another important role that's done on behalf of citizens of this province.

The Child and Youth Advocate has been around since 2002 and currently it is serviced by Ms. Carol Chafe who's been in that role since 2010. I think when we talk about – again, it was certainly before my time here in this House, but there is no one that questions the role and the duty done by these individuals when it comes to the protection of children and youth in our province. We've had some sad episodes in this province when it comes to things that have happened here, when we talk about things like the Turner inquiry, just absolute tragedies that have happened in this Province.

It is one of the things that our Child and Youth Advocate have taken on. In fact, it led to – and I believe it was created by the previous administration. The Department of Child, Youth and Family Service came out of this as well. I mean, there has been a definite move towards increased protection, increased awareness when it comes to the protection of children and youth in this province. We all know the stories that go around. It's a very tough role and, in fact, we have an independent individual as well as we have that department.

Finally, we have the Auditor General of the province who, again, I'll put it as basic as you can get it. This is the person who looks at the books of the province. We have had a number of these individuals over the years. We have had a gentleman named Mr. Terry Paddon who's been in that role since 2012.

I found it interesting actually that the first Auditor General in this province – I presume a gentleman. It says F.C. Berteau. That person held the role for 36 years, 1898 to 1934. There were no terms or defined periods of time you could serve back then. He had 36 years serving in that role, which is absolutely amazing. Generally, right now, as it relates to the Auditor General, that's a 10-year position.

I've laid out the statutory offices were discussing here. I'm sure the Members opposite will have an opportunity to talk about their

opinions on the offices, the individual's role and the work they do.

The purpose of this was that in looking at these pieces of legislation and these offices, the fact is they've evolved over a number of years and in many cases – I guess the intent of this piece of legislation was to bring a sense of uniformity to this. We have differences in terms of the length of time they can serve, differences in terms of the salary, differences in whether they can be reappointed or not, differences in how one would remove an individual from the office if there was cause or no cause. So there are a bunch of differences in these offices.

That's standard when you have offices that are created individually as opposed to being created the one time; you're going to have these differences. So what we've decided here is we wanted to bring some level of uniformity to make sure that – there is no one who is more important than the other. They all serve tremendous roles on behalf of the people of this province. They're all individuals who are independent of government. They fall under the House of Assembly. So what we've tried to do here is bring a sense of the same terms, conditions and when it comes to some idea of the expectations and what can be done for each of these pieces of legislation.

That's what we're talking about here. We want to standardize statutory offices. Some of the things we're talking about are the manner of appointment, the term of office, removal, suspension, salary and interim appointments. All of this is done in light of the fact that we've brought forward Bill 1 which was the Independent Appointments Commission, which all these offices will now fall under.

Previously, an individual would be selected by Cabinet, there would be a resolution brought to the House of Assembly and then debated on by all Members and a vote cast to appoint these individuals or not. As it was said before, the fact is I don't know if anyone has ever been turned down once a resolution has been brought forward. I know in some cases, it's certainly not unanimity. It's not always a unanimous vote. There have been cases where the Oppositions have voted against the resolution appointing certain individuals.

In this case, that's going to change now. What's going to happen is it's going to be the same thing, done through the Public Service Commission. We go through that process now where there's scrutiny, making sure we're taking into consideration all the different factors as we've discussed. Once it gets to that process and a person is deemed appropriate or – I guess that's the best word is appropriate – whether they meet the criteria to fit the bill for one of these offices, then it would go to an Independent Appointments Commission, which will then look at the individual submitted and select a roster of three names which will be submitted to Cabinet.

Again, I don't want to get too much into that process. I think we had a pretty lengthy debate here in this House on that process, whether you agree or disagree. Certainly, we think it's a step ahead of where we were, but what I want to talk about is why we're doing this. What we're saying is if we are going to change the process for the appointment of these individuals, we should also standardize each of their offices and their roles so that there are some similarities there because they should be treated similarly. Each one is an important role.

The other thing I would suggest is that there's one change here. The Information and Privacy Commissioner, that one is a bit different; that one was dealt with in this House last year through the new ATIPP Act, 2015. That position is also filled by the LGIC. It is done on a resolution of the House of Assembly, but the process that was adopted in that piece of legislation that was decided here in this House of Assembly is that there was a selection committee that would submit a roster of candidates. The Speaker would consult with the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition and Third Party, and then the resolution would be put forward naming an individual, one individual on the roster. That would be confirmed within 10 days of the appointment.

So with this new legislation, the appointment of all officers will be subject to the IAC, except for the Information and Privacy Commissioner at this time. This office will be required to be filled within the next few weeks and the IAC will not be in place by that time.

So the fact is we have four of these offices that are coming up to be vacant this year. We know the Chief Electoral Officer and Commissioner of Legislative Standards has indicated his retirement. We know that the access to information, IPC, Information Privacy Commissioner is actually, I think, due for June. I believe the Child and Youth Advocate is some time during 2016. I think it might be December of 2016. So that is actually four those positions there.

Right now, the Auditor General is a 10-year term, so Mr. Paddon will be in that role till 2022. And the Citizens' Representative has till, I'm not quite sure – I'll get into it; I have some notes here.

But the fact is that none of the current individuals will be affected by this. This is moving forward as opposed to being retroactive, so each of these individuals will not be affected. What it is, it's going to handle each vacancy as it comes open, going forward. It's just that we know that some of these are soon and we don't know that the IAC will be in place by that time, which is why we had no choice. In this case, we're also discussing interim appointments because we need to have a plan in place. We cannot have vacancies in these offices; you need to have them filled.

As I said earlier, the Information and Privacy Commissioner will follow the process set out in section 85 of the ATIPP Act, and I do have a copy of that here. This will be filled by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, so it will be filled by Cabinet on a resolution of the House. There is a selection committee and on that committee, it actually will comprise the Clerk of the Executive Council, Clerk of the House of Assembly, chief judge of Provincial Court, the president of Memorial University.

The selection committee will develop a roster of candidates and will publicly invite expressions and will submit that roster to the Speaker of the House, and the Speaker consults with the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition and will place a resolution in front of the House.

That's how that works. We feel that since that hasn't been used yet, we don't want to take out a process that we haven't even had a chance to

follow through on. That's why that one will be left the same. We do note that that act has a five-year statutory review; as well, this act will have a statutory review. That will be looked at later on.

Like any piece of legislation that's dealt with in this House, you may have to reassess them, to look at them, to determine whether they should be changed, modified because you want to have the best piece of legislation forward. We've seen that in the House in the past, we've seen it here in this session and we'll see it going forward. That's how it works. Legislation becomes outdated, practices change and we need to have best practices.

Terms of office: Currently the Citizens' Rep, Child and Youth Advocate and Information and Privacy Commissioner are six-year terms, renewable once. The IPC's reappointment must be approved by a double majority vote. The AG is a one term, non-renewable, 10-year term; and the Commissioner for Legislative Standards serves a five-year term with unlimited renewable terms, while the Chief Electoral Officer's term has no expiry. Obviously you can see some significant differences there between these statutory offices.

With this legislation that we're putting forward, we'll see five statutory officers appointed for a six-year term, renewable once, with the exception of the Auditor General who will continue to serve a 10-year, non-renewable term. I believe that is actually in line with all the other provinces. I think when that was discussed, it was the purpose of when you have a 10-year term it allows you to have some continuity to ensure – again, when we're talking about the financial operations of a province, I think that's necessary. I don't think there is any issue or any conflict with that.

Now, one of the issues that are discussed in this piece of legislation is removal when the House of Assembly is sitting and removal when the House of Assembly is not sitting. There was some discrepancy here amongst these statutory offices. So the language ranged, depending on which office you talked about. The Auditor General, Citizens' Representative and Commissioner for Legislative Standards may be removed for cause. The Child and Youth

Advocate and IPC may be removed for incapacity, neglect of duty, or misconduct. So you have some significant discrepancy there in what would constitute a reason to have somebody removed from that position.

The purpose of this legislation is simply to standardize the process and the language. In this case, what will happen is an individual can be removed by the LGIC on resolution by the House of Assembly, passed by a majority vote of Members actually voting, and statutory officers may be removed for incapacity to act, misconduct, cause or neglect of duty. In this case, it's a standardization of the process. It will encompass all offices so that one office is not treated differently than another.

We have the same terms that can be applied to ensure that if this situation – again, that's a situation that we hope we never have to deal with in this province. We don't want to see a resolution put forward in this House asking for the removal of an independent officer of the House of Assembly. It's one of those clauses where you have it. It's better to have it and not need it, then need it and not have it. In this case, certainly we don't want to see it but you have to be prepared for it.

Now, that's when the House is sitting. When the House is not sitting there's no provision in place for the suspension of the Chief Electoral Officer or the Commissioner for Legislative Standards when the House is not sitting. There are variations for suspensions for the other four statutory officers. The AG, the Child and Youth Advocate, the IPC and the Citizens' Rep may be suspended when the House is not in session, although the Citizens' Representative also requires a recommendation from the Management Commission. Only the IPC and Citizen's Representative specify that the suspension cannot continue beyond the end of the next sitting of the House of Assembly.

Again, these are the things that happen when you have offices created at different times, not at the same time as each other. You're going to have some differences in the legislation and in wording. We feel it should be – as we move forward here, as we bring in a new process, that we should have standardization. Through this legislation, the LG in Council may suspend any

of the statutory officers when the House is not in session for incapacity, neglect of duty, cause and misconduct; however, the suspension cannot continue beyond the end of the next sitting of the House of Assembly.

We had to have those provisions there. The fact is that this House sits on – I guess if you look at our history, we sit usually twice a year. There have been times when the House comes back in session for an emergency session. So the fact is you need the opportunity to be able to make significant decisions like this, especially ones where you're talking about a resolution that's brought forward for something as serious as misconduct or cause. We need to have that ability there.

That would lead us to interim appointments. These are obviously important positions. They cannot be left vacant. Right now there are considerable variations between the pieces of legislation for the different stat officers.

The legislative amendment we're putting forward here would allow for an individual to be appointed by the LG in Council on recommendation of the Management Commission on an interim basis. In the event a person is unable to perform duties, the office becomes vacant or an officer is suspended.

In the case of the Commissioner for Legislative Standards, there is no legislative mechanism to appoint someone on an interim basis and we need to fix that. We actually know that right now the position is going to be vacant, number one. An interim appointment section will be necessary for this position. This term expires May 31.

So if the IAC is not in place by May 31, we have a situation where we do not have a Commissioner for Legislative Standards. I don't think anybody in this House would suggest that is something we want to happen or can allow to happen. We need to ensure there's somebody put forward in an interim position, knowing that going forward these individuals will go through this new independent appointments process and go through the Public Service Commission as well.

We need to have someone acting here. I don't know how long this process will take. I don't know how long the IAC will take to be put in place. Obviously, given what I've said here in this House, we have a number of vacancies, a number of positions that need to be filled. These stat offices are very serious ones that we need to have filled.

I don't know how long the work of the IAC will take. It's an independent group. I don't know how long that process will take. These are things we'll figure out as we move forward with this newly created group. There will be an interim appointment, the person is put in and then the permanent person will go through this new independent process.

I would move forward to discuss salary. We want to talk about consistency in the salary provisions for all statutory officers. This will be decided by the House of Assembly Management Commission which does have representation from all parties. They will be consulted.

Salaries will be set by the LG in Council after consultation with the Management Commission. I would note, and I think this is important, salaries will reflect the province's current fiscal situation. That's something we all face as MHAs, we face as Cabinet ministers. I think statutory officers should face this as well. You don't want to have a case where there's a significant yo-yoing of salaries. I don't think that's what anybody is suggesting. The fact is we need to ensure that they're commensurate with the place that we currently occupy fiscally.

When it comes to the Information and Privacy Commissioner, that's one change we will be putting forward when it comes from the *ATIPP Act*. Just to provide that information, when it comes to the IPC, the act currently states that the next salary for the Information and Privacy Commissioner shall be 75 per cent that of a Provincial Court judge. A Provincial Court judge right now is in the range of \$215,000. So if you want to bring in that 75 per cent there, that will actually place that individual higher than the other statutory officers.

We all know it's been debated in this House, that right now an independent tribunal has actually recommended a raise for our Provincial

Court judges in the range of \$32,000. If we continue as is, using this legislation from 2015, that would raise the judge's salaries up to the \$240,000 range, and then it would be 75 per cent of that. You would have a person doing a statutory office, similar to the other offices, getting paid a significant amount more and one that's actually contingent on when it comes to the judiciary.

What we're suggesting in our case here – we want to suggest both consistency and we want to suggest fiscal prudence. We are going to suggest an amendment to *ATIPPA, 2015* so that the IPC compensation is in line with that of other statutory offices.

We do have some other amendments here. I don't think these are contentious by any means. The statutory officers will not be eligible to be nominated for election. I don't think anybody is going to disagree with that. They're not eligible to sit as an MHA. I think that would create a whole number of problems right there.

They can also not hold another public office with the exception of the Chief Electoral Officer who can also hold the role of Commissioner for Legislative Standards. That's been happening currently. I don't see there's any issue with that. I don't think you're going to hear any objection to that. So that would be the exception to the rule and vice versa. If you're a Commissioner for Legislative Standards you can be the Chief Electoral Officer.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. A. PARSONS: That's right.

The other thing is they cannot carry on a trade, business or profession. This is their role and it's a high standard to maintain one of these offices. These are things that are put in to protect and to safeguard the integrity of these offices, which I would also note there's certainly nobody saying here – these offices are held in high regard by everybody in this province. In fact, we've been very lucky to have individuals in these roles that, when they speak, there's respect given and we listen to what they have to say. There's no one questioning the integrity and we need to do everything we can to protect that and uphold that.

An amendment here again, uniformity. Statutory officers may resign in writing addressed to the Speaker. When it comes to pension benefits, the *Public Service Pensions Act, 1991* will apply to statutory officers if they were subject to the PSPA before their appointment. If the Statutory Officer was not subject to the PSPA prior to their appointment they will be paid for contribution into an RRSP in an amount equivalent to a contribution to the PSPP. If they were a civil servant before, there may be a different route that's taken other than an individual that comes from outside.

I think that I've laid out the changes here that we're suggesting. The bill is not significant in size. It's not a huge piece of legislation. I think what it's doing here – I know I am repeating myself, but I have to get across here. We're moving forward into a new process for appointment. These offices will be subject to that. So if we're going to do that, this is a great opportunity to standardize this legislation and take these offices, which are very important, do great work for the people, and provide some uniformity here so they are treated equally. That's what we're looking forward here.

There are a couple of small discrepancies, as I've outlined, for reasons that I've outlined here. I think this is a good piece of legislation. I would like to thank – I think sometimes I forget to do this and I know everybody in this House, having seen the work. I have to thank the people who draft these pieces of legislation. It's a significant amount of work that goes into this through Legislative Counsel, and all the people who pass on their thoughts and their input – and not just for this bill, for any bill.

At the end of the day, we're debating legislation that's going to govern the people of this province. So I'd like to thank those individuals who take their time to do this. They work very long hours. I know Members on the other side know the work they do. It's tremendous work. I'd also like to thank them for the time they put into giving the briefings to Members opposite.

When I was in Opposition, I don't know if I ever went to a briefing where the people who answered the questions weren't forthright, would give you answers, would you give you all the time they had to. I'd like to think that's

continued now. That there's been no change in that, because at the end of the day, as legislators, we have to stand here and speak to legislation and we have to know everything that goes into it. So I'd like to thank those individuals for the time they put into this.

I'm going to take my seat now. I know Members opposite will have an opportunity to speak to this during second reading. I will listen to that and make notes. I know when I get a chance to close this piece of legislation, or during the Committee stage, I will have an opportunity to answer questions that may arise.

Thank you for the opportunity, Madam Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER (Dempster) The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I am certainly glad to rise and speak to Bill 27. I recognize that the Government House Leader went through in detail the provisions of what's being proposed here in regard to Bill 27, respecting the statutory offices of the House of Assembly. And as has been said, talked about a number of acts basically standardized in the language and process around the manner of appointment of a number of these statutory offices that report to the House of Assembly and to look at the various manners in regard to the protocol for these statutory offices, things like appointments, term of office, removal, suspension and salary of statutory officers.

There are various pieces of legislation or statutes here governing the particular offices: the Auditor General; Child and Youth Advocate; Citizens' Representative; *Elections Act*; *House of Assembly Act*; the Commissioner for Legislative Standards only; also the act, Bill 27, will also amend the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* in order to make the salary provision consistent with other statutory offices.

As well, the Government House Leader mentioned Bill 1. The legislation will come into effect, I understand – we were briefed – at the

same time as Bill 1, the Independent Appointments Commission. Bill 1 discusses as well the appointment process and Bill 1 includes these offices in the schedule of appointments.

The Government House Leader did recognize those folks that put the legislation together and the time they spent. I also know our staff was briefed by officials as well. I want to recognize the information that was relayed to us in the briefing and the work that was done.

I will just touch quickly on a couple of those components in the statutory offices and what this bill is looking to amend and proceed with. With the Privacy Commissioner, we were briefed that the Government House Leader may make an amendment to remove the Information and Privacy Commissioner from Bill 1 Schedule. The reason for this is that the ATIPP Act, 2015 already has built within an independent recommendations committee consisting of the Clerk of the Executive Council, the Clerk of the House of Assembly, MUN president and chief justice.

What would happen, the committee would prepare a roster of recommendations and submit to the Speaker. The Speaker, in consultation with the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition and Leader of the Third Party, would make a recommendation here to the House of Assembly.

Section 2 of the bill makes changes to the ATIPP Act, 2015, and these were referenced just earlier by the Government House Leader, changes to the salary of the Privacy Commissioner from 75 per cent of a Provincial Court judge to a salary fixed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, after consultation with the House of Assembly Management Commission.

The fixed salary clause is found in most of the statutory offices. With the passage of this bill it would streamlined to be the same throughout all. I guess that's what we're talking about here in regard to the various statutes for these offices. It's about streamlining and making consistency throughout the statutory offices and the operations, especially related to those that are appointed to carry out the duties of the particular statutory offices. It's certainly important to note that the terms of the – and I think this was

mentioned earlier – Privacy Commissioner will expire, I believe, in June 2016.

We look at some of the other statutory offices that are in this bill and would be part of Bill 27: the Auditor General, Child and Youth Advocate, Citizens' Representative, Chief Electoral Officer and Commissioner for Legislative Standards. It's about standardizing the language with respect to the appointments, and as I said before, term of office and those other elements in regard to that whole particular office for these entities.

The highlights of the standardization going on with these particular officers and those that are appointed – we look at appointment, term of office, removal and suspension, acting officers, salary and pensions and benefits. With the appointment of these offices with an appointment to an identified person to fill such a vacancy, the Lieutenant Governor in Council, the Cabinet on resolution of the House of Assembly – so it would come here. This would occur after the IAC conducted a process and made recommendations to the House. Then you get into issues like terms of office.

The Auditor General right now is 10 years, not renewable, the same as AGs across the country. So there's some looking at obviously cross jurisdictional and what the issues are and trying to be consistent. All others would be six years, renewable once, for a maximum of 12 years. This is a change with respect to the Chief Electoral Officer. Previously, there was no limit on that particular tenure. This is an example of where it would be drawn into consistency with the other statutes and in regard to terms of office.

So we'd look at in the bill removal, suspension and acting officers. Again, there have been some amendments made in regard to consistency and streamlining of those particular areas.

Suspension by Cabinet, a majority recommendation of the House of Assembly – that would occur, obviously, when the Assembly was in session. If the House is not in session, Cabinet can suspend, but it will only be in force until the next sitting of the House. Obviously, at the first opportunity it would be brought back to the House of Assembly if it was not sitting at the point related to that decision was made.

The Lieutenant Governor in Council, on a recommendation of the commission, can appoint someone acting. So in that particular case there could be someone removed and, with the Lieutenant Governor in Council on a recommendation of the commission, there would be someone appointed in an acting role. Then, when the House of Assembly reconvenes, the resolution will be brought to the House to permanently fill the position.

In regard to salary, fixed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council and Cabinet after consultation with the House Management Commission. A note on that one, the Auditor General portion of the bill does not say House Management Commission, it only says commission. So we'll have a few questions maybe in committee in regard to Independent Appointments Commission or the House Management Commission. Then it goes on, Child and Youth Advocate, Citizens' Rep, the Electoral Office all say House Management Commission. So maybe in committee we'll ask a few questions and clarify that.

The other area of standardization that this bill will look at is regard to pensions and benefits. The language here is similar to the ATIPPA, 2015. If the officer was a member of the Public Service Pension Plan they can also continue. If they're not, my understanding is they can take a pension contribution and roll it over into an RRSP. That gets to the compensation piece and as well brings some standardization to the various statutes and how they operate the various acts.

As I said, it's a piece of legislation that I think is certainly worthwhile. It looks at bringing various aspects of statutory offices and the legislative framework to operate those. It brings consistency to them. The minister when he was up, the Government House Leader, outlined in detail the particulars of that.

As we move to committee, we may indeed have some questions in regard to clarification on actual particular things but I think overall on first review and some of the information we see, I think it is well intentioned. It certainly makes sense in terms of standardization and bringing those things together.

We'll look forward to further discussion and hear what Members of the House have to say on this particular piece of legislation. When we get into committee, if there are things that come up in discussion and debate that we think need to be clarified, that we have questions on, we'll certainly bring those questions up in committee.

I am sure the minister and House Leader will be quite eager to answer those questions and, no doubt, we'll have further discussion as we move forward.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

MR. WARR: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It is a pleasure to rise today in the House and speak to Bill 27, An Act to Amend the Law Respecting Statutory Offices of the House of Assembly. My comments, Madam Speaker, will mirror some of those already stated. I guess that's what happens when you speak a little further down the line. Nevertheless, I'll take a few minutes and offer some comments. I, too, certainly want to congratulate the minister and his department and staff for their due diligence, and for giving us the opportunity to sit with them in some explanations and some briefing notes concerning the bill.

Madam Speaker, the Citizens' Representative, the Child and Youth Advocate, the Auditor General, the Information and Privacy Commissioner, the Chief Electoral Officer and the Commissioner for Legislative Standards are absolutely vital to the democratic process here in our province. Each of these statutory offices plays a critical role.

The Auditor General, for example, provides independent oversight over financial expenditures made by government. With a budget in excess of \$8 billion, the Auditor General's role as an impartial reviewer becomes much more clear. The Auditor General provides government with suggestions for ways that we can be doing things better. There's always room for improvement, Madam Speaker. We can spend public dollars with a greater degree of

confidence knowing that we are in compliance with the Auditor General's suggestions.

The Child and Youth Advocate is another good example. Newfoundland and Labrador youth in care deserve a voice advocating directly on their behalf, a voice that is independent of the department. The individuals who have been serving in these statutory offices have been serving Newfoundlanders and Labradorians very well. We certainly thank them, Madam Speaker, for their service.

What we are proposing here today will impact future appointments not for the people who currently serve in these offices. The amendments will modernize and standardize the appointment process here in our province. It will also ensure that equitable decisions are made in appointing new statutory officers. It will ensure, Madam Speaker, consistency across the board when it comes to appointment, removal, suspension and salary for all statutory offices. This is in keeping with our commitment to openness, transparency and everything we do as a government.

This consistency will be established in a number of ways. All future statutory officers will serve a six-year term that is renewable once. The explanation to this, which is included in the legislation, is the Auditor General who will continue to be appointed for 10 years. A 10-year appointment is consistent with other provinces in Canada and other parliaments around the world, Madam Speaker.

The reason this exception is included is because it is important for the Auditor General to be able to serve a longer period of time for the purposes of institutional memory and in recognition of the fact that change to policy and practices may take a few years to demonstrate and impact once they are implemented.

These statutory officers won't be eligible to be nominated for election to sit as a Member in this hon. House, to hold another public office or to carry on in trade, business or profession. The reason this is being written into the legislation is to avoid the obvious potential for a conflict of interest.

It is an amendment, Madam Speaker, that acknowledges that statutory offices are positions

of great trust. Trust that is a two-way street between the officer and government. It protects the statutory officer from any allegation of potential conflict. It's a necessary and worthwhile amendment to the existing legislation.

They will be eligible to receive the same level of compensation as a deputy minister. These are offices that entail a huge amount of responsibility and require an immense time commitment. In view of this, it is important they are compensated properly in acknowledgement of the duties they carry out.

Madam Speaker, the amendments also give government the ability to appoint statutory officers on an interim basis, a necessary provision that will allow for circumstances that prevent an appointee from completing a full term of service. The existing legislation contains considerable variations between the parameters of service of the various statutory officers when it comes to a point in an interim.

For example, in the legislation respecting the Commissioner for Legislative Standards there is no mechanism for appointing an interim officer. The amendments we debate here today will standardize the interim appointment process ensuring that we are able to fill a vacancy quickly so that the best interest of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians continue to be served.

Their appointments must be confirmed by resolution in this House of Assembly. This is an essential part of ensuring transparency and consistency, and allowing the appointment to take place in the people's House, Madam Speaker, in view of all their elected representatives and the province as a whole.

This is a very timely piece of legislation and I am happy to speak in favour of it. Four of our current statutory officers, the Child and Youth Advocate, the Commissioner for Legislative Standards, the Chief Electoral Officer and the Information and Privacy Commissioner will conclude their terms this year. This means, Madam Speaker, that the new standards we legislate here today will apply very shortly to the new statutory officers that will be appointed by this hon. House later this year.

Many of the objectives achieved by these amendments are in line with government's firm policy on openness and transparency in whatever we do. We have been debating this Legislative Session in the creation of an Independent Appointments Commission, which was our signature piece of legislation and the very first item on the docket as we convened this spring.

We proposed the creation of the commission for the purpose of taking the politics out of government appointments. We wanted to empower an independent commission, Madam Speaker, to select the best candidates for the job in the interest of transparency.

The Independent Appointments Commission will hold public competitions to recruit candidates for further statutory officer appointments. Madam Speaker, this suite of amendments to the existing legislation on statutory offices will serve to ensure that the Independent Appointments Commission is able to function with the force of a strong legislative mandate behind it.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'll take my seat. I thank you for your time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Thank you to my colleague as well. I want to just speak very briefly to this bill today. It's An Act to Amend the Law Respecting Statutory Offices of the House of Assembly. I think it's a sensible and logical piece of legislation, so I really can't add a whole lot to what previous speakers have said.

What government is attempting to do here is make changes to a number of acts to really bring some standardization around language and processes related to how officers are appointed, their terms, how they get removed from office, what happens if they should be suspended and salaries. We're talking about the *Auditor*

General Act, the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*, the *Citizens' Representative Act*, the *Elections Act* and the *House of Assembly Act* as it relates to the Commissioner for Legislative Standards. There's also an amendment to the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 2015* in order to make salary provisions consistent with other statutory officers.

There is a connection, interestingly enough, to Bill 1 which we spent considerable time debating yesterday. It will be interesting to hear – perhaps when we get to the Committee stage – the Government House Leader talk to us a little bit more about how that connection works with Bill 1.

As I said, this bill addresses the appointment of these statutory officers of the House, their terms of office, trying to bring about some consistency. It talks about how acting officers will be handled and the removal and suspension of officers. It talks about salary and that needs to be addressed.

There's also reference to pension and benefits. The language there seems to be similar to the language in the ATIPP Act whereas if the officer was a member of the Public Service Pension Plan, then they can continue and if not, they can roll a contribution into an RSP. I won't get too technical on all of that. We'll have an opportunity to review some more of those details at the Committee stage.

I want to join the Opposition House Leader in just raising a couple of issues that really we're just looking for some information on. We can definitely address it either when the minister closes debate or when we get to Committee. This seems like a logical and sensible piece of legislation which I believe we can support. It would be helpful if the minister could tell us a little bit more about how the bill fits with Bill 1. That would be helpful in us gaining a more complete understanding of the legislation.

When it comes to the salary issues, I would assume the House Management Commission would have input on all the salaries. So we'll get some clarification on that because the Auditor General portion of the bill doesn't actually specifically state the House Management Commission. I suspect that's what meant by

Commission because in the *Child and Youth Advocate Act* and the *Citizens' Rep Act* and the act related to the Chief Electoral Office; they all refer to House Management Commission. I imagine the intent is to make them consistent.

The minister may also want to comment on term limits. I believe there will now be term limits put in place which affects, I guess, the Chief Electoral Officer's term because I don't believe there's a term in place for that role at the moment. In terms of retirement benefits, I'm also curious: Do these officers retain their health benefits upon retiring? Those are just a few information questions that we have. I'm sure the Government House Leader can help clarify those matters.

It seems like a good piece of legislation. I'm happy to have had the chance to rise and say a few words about it today.

Thank you.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FINN: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise and speak today to Bill 27, An Act to Amend the Law Respecting Statutory Offices of the House of Assembly, as the Government House Leader introduced earlier today. We are just looking at streamlining some of the processes here. Part of that is a direct result of the bill which saw its third reading last night, Bill 1, the Independent Appointments Commission.

As the Government House Leader alluded to as well, there are basically six offices we're looking at kind of streamlining right now. The whole reason behind that is because they came into act at very different times, with the Auditor General dating back to 1898 to the ATIPP officer to 2015.

So at various times these pieces of legislation were introduced. Right now, the whole objective is just to look at streamlining some of the provisions in those pieces of legislation, particularly around the terms of office, removal,

suspension, salary, as alluded to, we're looking to streamline as well. Currently, each separate piece of legislation addresses each statutory officer, but it's the various provisions which change in each piece of legislation.

Right now, this is something we're really confident in doing. We also expect a great deal of co-operation from the Members opposite, as well as Member of the Third Party. The Member for Mount Pearl North just mentioned one or two questions there around some health benefits. I feel quite confident the Government House Leader will have some answers to address that as well.

Again, in an action of openness and transparency, we're basically just looking to streamline all these pieces of legislation to make sure they're in line and that one different act doesn't take away from another, particularly around terms of office, salary and appointments. And right now, again, in particular, due to the implementation of Bill 1 which just passed for third reading last night.

I don't have much more to add, other than generally thanking the individuals who serve in these roles. These are very important roles that provide different, unique services to the people of our province, whether that's the Child and Youth Advocate office or the Auditor General as well.

In terms of each of these areas, the whole role of advocacy, the Office of the Citizens' Representative, the Chief Electoral Officer and Commissioner for Legislative Standards, these are very important roles and they need to be treated with a high degree of integrity. We certainly respect and appreciate all the hard work that these individuals do and now with this piece of legislation we're streamlining it so that they're treated fairly as well.

Other than that, Madam Speaker, I don't really have much more to add to the bill. As I briefly mentioned there, I believe we are expecting a great deal of co-operation, as Members opposite have indicated as well.

With that, I will thank you for having the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 27.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Yes, I'm pleased this afternoon to stand and speak to Bill 27, An Act to Amend the Law Respecting Statutory Offices of the House of Assembly. Basically a housekeeping act, but a very important housekeeping act dealing with one, two, three, four, five, six of our statutory offices. Making sure that we have conformity with regard to the manner of appointment, the term of – not conformity with regard to the terms of office because they have different ones, but certainly the manner of appointment, the process for removal from office and the salary of the officer, to have clear regulations that are the same for all of these statutory offices.

As has been explained by the minister in presenting the bill, some of these bills have been in place for many years and some are brand new such as the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 2015* but the *Elections Act* was 1991.

What we have is that over the years things evolved, and one of the things that evolved that the bill is picking up on is the way in which salaries are set for the different officers. Before, very often, the salary was set by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. Sometimes it was not.

With regard to the Provincial Court, for example, Clyde Wells prescribed 75 per cent of the salary of Provincial Court judges in his legislation. When he did the review of the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* he actually prescribed what should happen with regard to Provincial Court judges. But this bill changes what was in Wells's legislation and makes sure that the salary is fixed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, but after consultation with the House of Assembly Management Commission.

I think what the general public would not know – we know here in the House of Assembly, but the general public doesn't know, Madam

Speaker – is that the House Management Commission, when it was put in place –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. MICHAEL: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

One of the things that, as I was saying, the general public may not know is that the House of Assembly Management Commission is not just responsible for the elected Members of the House of Assembly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. MICHAEL: The House of Assembly Management Commission is also responsible for the statutory offices. For example, at budget time, when the statutory offices put their budgets together they actually come to private meetings with the House of Assembly Management Commission. We sit with them when we go through their budgets line by line. I'm a Member of it right now, that's why I'm saying we.

The House of Assembly Management Commission is responsible for holding the statutory offices accountable for their expenditures and for any increases that they may need in their budget. So then we're the ones who actually, at the level of the House of Assembly Management Commission, approve their budgets. As I said, that's something people would not know because that's not something that's done in public. Things that deal with money in the House of Assembly Management Commission, the discussions happen in private, but then we come publicly and declare what it is that we have approved.

The change that this bill is recording here is noting something that has changed in practice because of the House of Assembly Management Commission having been put in place in 2007. It's important then that the pieces of legislation

referring to these six offices reflect the reality of what it is that happens.

I do have a couple of questions for the minister to consider. He may answer them today or when we go into Committee. Now that the Independent Appointments Commission is approved – and I don't know when Royal Assent will come; I presume Royal Assent is going to come quickly because of the vacancies that exist. But now that the IAC will be put in place and all of these statutory offices will come under the IAC – except the access to information does not, all the rest do.

Because of that, I'm wondering – and again I'm hoping the minister can answer this. I have two questions. My first one is with regard to the vacancies that are going to be filled on an interim basis. I wasn't clear what the minister meant, so I'm just going to ask him to clarify so I'm sure I understand.

There will be interim appointments because I suspect the process has to take at least some time because the commission has to be put in place. After the commission is put in place, I presume they have to be notified of the vacancies then they have to start the process with the Public Service Commission to have the Public Service Commission begin the process of searching for people who can be considered to fill the vacancies.

When the minister spoke about the interim appointments, I wasn't sure if he meant that people in those positions would then automatically become part of that process and be considered for the permanent position, or are they out of the picture? I wasn't clear about the situation, so I'm asking the minister to clarify that for me.

The other thing, it's more a long-term thing. Right now we have a lot of vacancies. I would hope that with this new process in place, with the IAC in place, that we would see better efficiency with government with vacancies not being as frequent and not be there for a long time. So I'd like the minister then – he's nodding at me over there, so I'm right on that point. So then I'll be asking him to tell us – I presume it is going to be the Lieutenant

Governor in Council's responsibility to notify the commission of vacancies.

I'm interested in that process. How is that going to happen in such a way that things will happen in a timely fashion so that we don't have long periods of time with vacancies? I would like a bit more detail on that from the minister.

I'd like an explanation too from the minister, the rationale with regard to the pension. Basically, what it comes down to is two positions: one is the Citizens' Representative and the other is the Auditor General. What is going to happen is if somebody is hired from outside the public service in one of those two positions, they would not be part of the *Public Service Pensions Act*. Only if somebody is hired from within the public service and who is under the *Public Service Pensions Act* – only if somebody like that is appointed to one of these two positions, will that person continue with their pension.

If somebody comes in from outside to be appointed to one of those two positions, they will not come under the *Public Service Pensions Act*. Instead, they will receive an equivalent amount of money that they then can put into a private plan. It won't be a pension; it will be a private investment plan.

I'd like to know from the minister what the rationale is for that. Why wouldn't they become part of the Public Service Pensions Plan? I really am interested in the rationale.

Having said that, Madam Speaker, obviously, we're going to be going along with this bill, it's an essential bill to make sure things are in good order. As we go on with our discussions this afternoon in second reading and in Committee, I'll be interested in hearing the minister's explanations around those three points that I've made.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LANE: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Let me say, first of all, what a pleasure it is to stand here in this House of Assembly and have a few words on Bill 27. It seems like a long time since I've stood up and actually spoken on something.

Today we're going to be speaking to An Act to Amend the Law Respecting Statutory Offices. I think pretty much everything has been covered. Of course that's always the challenge when you get up to speak a little bit later, is that everyone else has already said everything and you try not to be too repetitive.

The points that have been made here, first of all, I think it's important to note – as has already been noted, but it's important to note again that this legislation does tie into Bill 1, which was passed last night. While I didn't have the opportunity to speak to Bill 1, because quite frankly I spent most of my time in the Chair, I think it's important to note that Bill 1 that did pass last night was a good step forward, there's no doubt.

There's also no doubt that the Opposition parties did raise some points and there were some amendments made. There were some things that didn't pass. There were some things that were ruled out of order, but I think they did make some points and some valid points, nonetheless. As time goes on, hopefully we can see improvements to Bill 1. I'm sure we will.

One of the things that did come out of the discussion around Bill 1 last night, which was raised by the Third Party, was the whole concept of putting a diversity lens on these appointments. I think it is important just to note – as we are talking about some pretty significant appointments here that would be doing important work for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. I'm sure the minister will agree and I'm sure it will happen.

I think it is important to note, in the spirit of what the Third Party was saying last night, that we do put a diversity lens on these appointments, particularly these new people who are going to be retiring and so on. As we look to replace those people, it is important that we try to be reflective of the society in which we live

in. I think everybody here would agree with that, regardless of what side of the House of Assembly you are on. I think it's an important point to make.

Madam Speaker, again, as it comes to this particular bill, really what we're doing is we're taking a number of acts, we're taking the *Auditor General Act*, *Child and Youth Advocate Act*, *Citizens' Representative Act*, *Elections Act* and so on, and we're standardizing those acts. The rationale of course is all of those acts pertain to important positions within the province that do important work for the people and to standardize those acts because they were created at different points in time in history, therefore they're not necessarily all consistent. What we're trying to do here is to bring consistency to it.

Of course, the positions we will be talking about have been mentioned. We're talking about the Chief Electoral Officer; the Commissioner of Legislative Standards, that person is one in the same. We're talking about the Auditor General. We're talking about the Child and Youth Advocate. We're talking about the Citizens' Representative. We're talking about the Privacy Commissioner.

I would assume when we have legislation come into this House of Assembly around the office of the seniors' advocate, I would assume at that point in time that legislation would also mirror the changes we're seeing in these acts as well. That would certainly make sense to me. I would assume that's what's going to happen. It is important to do that. It's important to bring consistency.

The things we're talking about are the terms of appointment, the removal of somebody from office, interim appointments, suspensions, salaries and so on. If you look at the acts that I referenced, and it's all covered here in Bill 27, the various acts, you will see that when it comes to a number of these things around salaries, appointments and so on, they're different for different offices. You have different terms. You have different salaries and so on, and different means of removing people or reasons for removing people. We're just standardizing it right across the board so that it's consistent for

all. I think it's important to do just that, Madam Speaker.

I could go on and on, but I don't really see the need for it. I've got a feeling; I've got a strange suspicion this is going to pass unanimously. I really think that's going to happen, and that's obviously a good thing. We don't see that happen all the time, sometimes we do.

I've heard the Opposition say, and certainly when I was in Opposition I would say the same thing, if you bring forward good legislation that makes sense then there's no reason why everybody wouldn't vote for it. I've got a feeling this is a piece of legislation that's going to do just that.

So I encourage everybody to support this legislation. It's a good piece of legislation, and I thank you for your time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: If the hon. the Government House Leader speaks now he will close debate.

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

I am quite pleased actually with the second reading on this piece of legislation so far. Although if I wanted to be facetious, responding to the comments from Mount Pearl – Southlands, I could say there's lots of legislation we brought forward that makes good sense that the Opposition just doesn't agree with. Again, I'm just being facetious there.

I get what the Member is saying in that. The fact is even though it's an important piece of legislation – I agree with the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi – it's housekeeping in nature and it's not changing their roles or the work they do. What it's doing is standardizing it. Again, I certainly appreciate that.

What I am going to do, I will try my best to respond to the questions raised but we will be going into committee. So if I didn't answer it or if I forget it, please make sure you take an opportunity to stand and ask again. I have gotten the answers. Thankfully, that great staff I

referenced in my first comments have been getting in touch with me to help clarify it. I think I knew a few of the answers, although some of them, particularly the health benefits, I wasn't quite positive, but we have staff who do a great job of making sure the information is there.

In no particular order, I think one of the comments from the Opposition House Leader was about the commission. I think that's actually – it is the Management Commission. What is it, it is actually referred to earlier in the act as the Management Commission under the definition side. So that's why when it goes to the section you referred to under the *Auditor General Act* and just says commission, it is Management Commission. That would clarify that aspect.

I think the Deputy Opposition House Leader talked about health benefits for statutory officers. What I would say is they are not addressed in this particular piece of legislation. A response has actually been sent to Members of the Opposition and their staff. So everything I'm saying here now should be clarified in writing. I have no problem standing and speaking, putting it on the record.

A link was sent setting out revised Treasury Board policy respecting criteria related to the eligibility for other post-employment benefits. These changes stem from the *Other Post-Employment Benefits Modifications Act* which was passed by this House in December 2014, which is listed below.

In order to qualify for group health and life benefits pass retirement one must: one, be in receipt of a pension from a defined benefit plan, whether it is PSPA, TPA, et cetera; two, have 10 years of service; three, retire immediately with no deferral of benefits allowed.

That's the criteria. I believe it has been sent out. If there are still any questions that Members have, I'm sure they can raise that and I will try my best to answer. I think that's something that in fact, it might even be better talking to the individuals in the Finance Department because they are certainly more qualified to answer that than I am.

One of the questions from the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi was talking about the

internal appointment process, and would an individual that is appointed under an interim process be precluded from being able to apply under the full process. I would say no. I don't believe that's the case.

I don't think there's anything that can stop an individual. Now I think most individuals who would do that would likely not be interested in doing it in a full-time manner but I don't think there is anything that stops them from going through the process established and having their name considered for that position. That's my understanding of how that process will work. Again, it goes to the recommendations and everything else.

We may see that very soon because, as we know, the Commissioner for Legislative Standards and CEO or Chief Electoral Officer, I think that's May 30. So I can say, obviously, we would like to see Royal Assent for this bill. We would like to see the resolution brought to this House soon and we'd like to see them get up and running.

I may have heard this wrong, you can clarify if I am wrong. We talk about the vacancies, and what are we going to do to make sure they are filled and done on a timely basis. I can say from my very short time here – and I think the problem may exist on a number of levels. I think in some cases when you go through these processes, whether it's the Public Service Commission, just the sheer amount of work that's there can delay these things.

Again, I've seen that, maybe not so much in the appointment process, but in the natural job process when it comes to positions within the civil service. In fact, you see people applying for a position, they go through this process, then they're wondering where am I in this process and they're waiting to hear.

I think sometimes that can get backed up there. I don't think that's a new issue. I think that's been there for some time, but I'd like to think that the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, who handles the Public Service Commission, I'd like to think that we can try to make this work faster because it's tough for two reasons. Number one, if you have a vacancy, you want it filled. You want the work done.

Number two, the person that is applying for a position, they want a job and if they're qualified, the quicker we can make these two things come together it is better for everybody, so I'd like to think it's going to happen.

The second part of this we're talking about is sometimes in the appointments process I think you have to want to get it done. I'm talking about the appointments. So right now, under the process that I would have come into, but I haven't, I step in and there's X number of A, B, C's that may fall under the Department of Justice and Public Safety. So you're trying to learn what they are, who's there, who's expired and there's a number of them that are expired. Number one, I can say that I've gotten numerous letters from the heads of foundations, pre-existing members, or people who are responsible saying fill these positions, get them done.

I've had to write back and say no, I can't do it; we have to wait for this process. Normally, if this process wasn't put in place, I could just fill them and get them done. I could have them done as quickly as I wanted to do them. Why weren't they done? I can't answer; I have no idea. But I'd like to think that if I'm going to stand here and talk about how important it is to fill it, I'm going to do my best to ensure that it gets done as soon as possible.

So the power has been taken away from me in some cases. Under the tier twos, the names will come through to me and I can't act until I get the names. Once I get the names, it's my duty to get these filled as soon as possible as soon as I get those names.

Under the IAC, I'd like to think – and I don't want to prejudge it; I don't want to place undue expectations on these individuals that will fill that role. But I'd like to think that they're going to have to move fast. And there's that fine line between due diligence, no different than anybody. If I run a business, I have a job vacancy and people put their resumes in when they come in, I want that job filled because I need that work done. But I'm going to give it the time that it needs because if I make a bad hiring decision, I'm going to cause myself a lot of problems down the road. And we've seen that in government, we've seen that in private service and we've seen that everywhere.

If you don't have a good hiring process, you can get yourself in trouble because once you take that on then there comes a whole new set of responsibilities, employment and law labour. So I'd like to think that there's a fine line where we want to move it quick but, at the same time, that responsibility will come down to Cabinet as well. We all know that the names are put forward to Cabinet. Cabinet is to appoint. If we delay it, then we're causing our own problem.

I know that might not be a satisfactory answer. I think we have to see where we are. It is like anything new, you assess it after a period of time and gauge where you are. Are there things that can be done – is it working smoothly, swimmingly? I hope that's the cause.

I'd like to think that it will be very streamlined. I'd like to think that, and I have no reason not to think that. If there are issues and they are identified, we have to do our best to make sure that they are addressed as well.

I think I've covered off that but, again, if I've missed anything, I know that the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi will stand up and ask in Committee and I'll do my best to get those answers.

On that note, I will sit down now. I would like to thank Members opposite and on our side for their contributions to this debate. This is a good piece of legislation. It's a necessary one, and I think it is in the best interest of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

On that note, I will stand and close second reading and look forward to the Committee stage of this process.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

Is it the pleasure of the House that the said bill be now read a second time?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MADAM SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Law Respecting Statutory Offices Of The House Of Assembly. (Bill 27)

MADAM SPEAKER: This bill has now been read a second time. When shall this bill be referred to a Committee of the Whole?

MR. A. PARSONS: Now.

MADAM SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, "An Act To Amend The Law Respecting Statutory Offices Of The House Of Assembly," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 27).

MADAM SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Education, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 27.

MADAM SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair for the House to resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider the said bill, Bill 27, An Act To Amend The Law Respecting Statutory Offices Of The House Of Assembly.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MADAM SPEAKER: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole, Madam Speaker left the Chair.

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Lane): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 27, An Act To Amend The Law Respecting Statutory Offices Of The House Of Assembly.

A bill, "An Act To Amend The Law Respecting Statutory Offices Of The House of Assembly." (Bill 27)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for the District of St. John's East – Quidi Vidi.

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

The question I have is to continue a conversation with the minister over an answer he gave to me, because it covers sort of all of the bill – there is no other place for me to stand and ask it. It has to do with the appointments by the commission.

Really, what my question was, Minister, I'm talking about prior to vacancies happening. For example, if the Cabinet knows there's a position coming up that's soon going to be empty because of retirement or something, it's something they're responsible for; or if you, as the Minister of Justice, know there's something coming up that you're responsible for, is it not true that you then are the ones who have the responsibility to notify the commission that this may be coming up?

That's what I'm looking at. Sort of prior to the commission having the stuff in their hands, who lets the commission know that there are vacancies coming up in the 34 agencies they're going to be responsible for?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: I will lead off by saying, obviously, that's not – I'm not saying I'm not going to have a chat about it, but that's not part of this. I would suggest with these ones here, that would be the House of Assembly's

responsibility I would assume to notify the commission, given they are statutory offices of the House of Assembly.

As it relates to your question when it comes to tier one and tier two, it's my belief that depending on which department the board, commission or agency falls under, yes, you would make the commission aware of what is there, what is vacant. If I came in, I learn what is there then we have to make them aware so they know, so it can be advertised as well.

I would assume that the Public Service Commission will have to be – probably more importantly, the Public Service Commission, rather than the IAC, because the IAC – I might have this wrong. I'm just sort of thinking out this in common sense way. There's probably somebody smarter who knows the answer to this. The Public Service Commission – who are the ones that are going to advertise this, put it online, make it accessible – are obviously going to need to know, who are all the different groups? I think that's all going to be put online, every one of them: vacant, non-vacant, eligible, non-eligible. It has to be put online, as well as the process for one to apply.

If I have, for instance, the Law Foundation Commission, then it would be my – and I'm getting requests to make sure that's filled, then, yeah, I might have a conversation with the PSC to say, look, this is the group here, make sure they're online. There are vacancies coming up, make sure we get the ads out so that people from all over can apply, put their resumes in, go through that screening process, then put it in front of me so I can make that decision.

I might be wrong, the PSC has to be that group. The IAC, I would assume, is only going to respond to information that is forwarded to them by the PSC, because everything the IAC sees has to be pre-screened by the PSC. Everything has to go through that process. The PSC, which is also going to be responsible for the advertising side or I guess the publication or notification of the information, that's where that would be handled.

When it comes to the statutory offices we are debating here now, I would assume the House of Assembly would obviously make sure the PSC knows that, look, these are the offices here.

These are when the due dates are coming. So that we can have – I think, obviously, you need advance notice. If we know an individual or a spot is going to be open in X-amount of time, then let's do the work beforehand if we know an individual is moving on.

I will just use the example that we know of right now. Mr. Powers has given notice that he's going to retire. If we had known all this before – just assume everything was in place and that was in two months' time, then why would we wait until the actual retirement date when you can do better succession planning and have that put forward so we can try as best as possible to (a) avoid an interim appointment, and (b) have a gap in the amount of time in which one of these positions is vacant.

That's my take. If I get any contradictory evidence to that, I'll certainly pass it on during this committee.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for the District of St. John's East – Quidi Vidi.

MS. MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Those who are listening back in your office and looking up stuff, I know they'll get the clarification. It seems to me, though, when it comes to appointment of these six, it's actually the LGIC who does the appointment. They don't consult with the House of Assembly Management Commission.

We take care of financial stuff, but the appointments happen from council.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MS. MICHAEL: Yes.

My question, what I'm trying to get at, with the commission in place who's going to coordinate to make sure the appointments are happening, that there's a notification? Because I'm assuming that somebody must coordinate now for the Cabinet. Is it the Executive Council, do you know? That's what I'm trying to get at. Who will do that coordination?

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: I believe that would be the Clerk of the Executive Council who will take that role in ensuring all this is put forward, and through the PSC and through all the process that's going to unfold. That's my understanding, it is the Clerk.

CHAIR: Seeing no further speakers, shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clauses 2 through 8 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 2 through 8 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 8 carried.

CLERK: Be it enacted by the Lieutenant Governor and House of Assembly in Legislative Session convened, as follows.

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: An Act To Amend The Law Respecting Statutory Offices Of The House Of Assembly.

CHAIR: Shall the long title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

Motion, that the Committee report having passed the bill without amendment, carried.

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: I move, Mr. Chair, that the Committee rise and report Bill 27.

CHAIR: It has been moved that the Committee rise and report Bill 27.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

On motion, that the Committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again, Madam Speaker returned to the Chair.

MADAM SPEAKER (Dempster): The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands.

MR. LANE: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them

referred and have directed me to report Bill 27 without amendment.

MADAM SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed him to report Bill 27 without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

MR. A. PARSONS: Now.

MADAM SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the bill be read a third time?

MR. A. PARSONS: Tomorrow.

MADAM SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, report received and adopted. Bill ordered read a third time on tomorrow.

MADAM SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: Madam Speaker, I would call from the Order Paper, Motion 1, the Budget Speech.

MADAM SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. PARSLEY: Good afternoon, Madam Speaker.

It's quite an honour to stand here today and speak on this budget. It's an honour anytime we have to get up and speak on Members' statements or whatever we have to do, but this is an honour for me today.

We all came here as newly elected Members to government to make Newfoundland and Labrador a better place. It's unfortunate our province is in such a mess. We have to be strong leaders and head us out of this fiscal crisis which we are now facing.

I came from a rural district which serves over 10,000 constituents with many needs. As you

know, I have a strong background in municipal affairs. As you can tell, the parts of this budget, municipal governments are going to benefit from this. I'm hoping to meet with most of them in the coming weeks and be able to announce what we have planned.

On behalf of my colleagues in the government caucus, I am pleased to offer my perspective and ultimately my support for this piece of legislation. It has now been over three weeks since Minister Bennett presented the Budget Speech in the hon. House. During that time the budget has been examined, picked apart by the Opposition, in the media and by our own caucus Members alike. I won't deny there is much in this budget that I don't like. I won't deny that my constituents are flatly against the budget.

I've attended many events in my district since April 14 and I have fielded dozens, if not hundreds, of calls and emails from the people who reside in the Harbour Main area. Again and again I hear from constituents how difficult the revenue measures in the budget will be on them. Again and again I hear the hardships that *Budget 2016* will cause in communities around our province. I'm standing here and speaking in favour of this budget, but I am not deaf to the issues and problems that the budget will cause around Newfoundland and Labrador.

I will come back to the reason I'm supporting the budget in the face of widespread outrage from my constituents, but first I have talk about the outrage itself. Because people out there every day are exercising their democratic rights to have their voices heard through protests and civil action. There are many people marching on Confederation Building and rallying by the hundreds and thousands in protest of the budget. There are dozens of calls on the *Open Line* shows and the panels. There are frustrated interview subjects on the news.

People have taken to social media in great numbers to protest the 2016 budget. They have made their voices heard in almost every possible way. There's a mood of frustration in the province right now, Madam Speaker. While this budget has broken into focus, I believe it's a mood that has been in the back of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians minds for years and years.

Everyone has a reason to be frustrated, but we need to be truthful and factual of the authors of this frustration. As tempting as it is to blame the people who wrote up the documents that Minister Bennett presented on April 14, they are simply the messengers, and so are we. We are messengers. The news in this, after 12 years of incompetence, arrogance, mismanagement from the Tories, we are broke. We're worse than broke; we are faced with a debt crisis that far exceeds any other jurisdiction in the country, including Quebec.

Madam Speaker, it is not even breaking news; the PCs had full access to the province's Treasury for 12 years. They had Newfoundland and Labrador's chequebook in their own hands. They had our financial presents and future in their hands and what they chose to do with it was take out an enormous mortgage to win points with voters and vested interests.

They took out this mortgage on our future with a care-free ease of spending someone else's money. As long as resource revenues were pouring in, they could continue pushing the debt crisis towards future governments, future generations to deal with. The province's resource revenues allowed the PCs to continue riding the fiction that under their stewardship Newfoundland and Labrador was now an economic powerhouse.

Madam Speaker, it's true we have more money flowing into our Treasury than ever before in our history, but the only thing we were was a powerhouse that was ringing up debt and causing instability, public spending that would prove to be vulnerable to the slightest hiccup of the global commodity prices. It's been said by my hon. colleagues but it bears repeating once again by me: The Tories squandered what should have been a birth right for our province.

Madam Speaker, they blew nearly \$30 million and we have nothing to show for it but an economic public debt, an unfavourable economic future and an unhappy population who is sick of being let down by their elected leaders.

When I say they're writing a fiction, a false narrative of prosperity, I really mean it. It was such an effective fiction that we all bought at least part of it. We believed we were hearing

that Newfoundland and Labrador was finally a province that we are now the masters of our own destiny and the days of hardship were behind us, but the definition of fiction is a story that isn't true. What the PCs were telling us and what we were mostly happy to believe was simply not true. It could have been if they had spent those dozens of billions wisely. Because they were reckless with revenues, their story was false. We began to see just how untrue their story was when the bottom fell out of the oil market, very rapidly the whole narrative collapsed as well.

I mentioned that the mood of frustration has been lingering in people's minds for years and years. I think that's true. Even during the heights of the boom there were only certain areas of the province, economically, that benefited. People who worked in the oil patch were doing all right. Madam Speaker, people who worked in the construction sector were doing all right. People who sold houses or trucks were doing fine. Of course, the PC appointees to the cushy positions in government were doing all right.

The boom made things harder for lots of people in Newfoundland and Labrador. The boom drove up housing prices and rent. It drove up the cost of consumer goods. It widened the divide between the have and the have-nots here at home. Remember, even at the height of the boom, employment spiked in certain areas, namely the Avalon Peninsula, but other parts of the province still suffered from some of the highest employment rates in the country.

All of this economic inequality persisted through the boom. The people it affected had to endure hardships the whole time. Those people have been frustrated now for a long time, and there are more of these people than the PCs would have us think. Then the boom collapsed and even the people who benefited started to suffer.

Fort McMurray started sending its unemployment back home to Newfoundland and Labrador. People here in the province lost the oil patch or construction jobs. The real estate market has tanked too. All of this adds up to a recipe for serious popular outrage.

Madam Speaker, do we feel good about having to implement such a tough budget? Absolutely not, but we simply have no choice. We either act

now and start to correct Newfoundland and Labrador's finances, or we give up and give in and keep our spending at a similar level. If we give in, then the economic prosperity that we had a taste of will never be ours again. So that's why I'm supporting this budget.

I hear the frustration and outrage from my constituents and from Newfoundland and Labradorians across the province. I share it, but my outrage is directed at the crowd opposite who have placed us in this position. I'm supporting the budget because I know it contains a credible and workable plan to correct the province's course.

Nothing in this budget is left to chance or wishful thinking. It's simply a reduction of spending and a structural increase in revenue that will – over time – result in a return to surplus, and not even over a long period of time. According to the financial projections, if we follow the measures outlined in this budget, we will certainly return to a surplus in seven years. That's with fairly pessimistic resource price projections. If resource prices recover sooner, we will return to surplus sooner. Surplus is the key to bettering our financial position.

And now the boom is on the horizon and we're sailing towards it. We may not reach it this year, or next year, or even in five years' time, but we will reach it. And if we have our financial house in order, next time we'll be ready for it and we will not fail, as the PCs have done. That's why I'm supporting the budget because this is a necessary step along the way to prosperity, because what we were told was prosperity under the guiding hands of the Tories was actually a detour into a debt crisis with no easy solution.

I will conclude my remarks by citing a few of the positive aspects of the budget, apart from the fact that it's the first step into fixing things. For one thing, the budget invests over \$75 million in new spending to protect the most vulnerable in our province. There's a Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement that will go towards easing the financial burden of the new revenue measures for the most vulnerable in our society. There are enhancements for the existing seniors. So for the most vulnerable in our province, the low-income individuals, families

and seniors, there is help and we're committing to taking care of them.

Another thing to remember is that the newer levels of taxation that are implemented, even with all the increases, our people will still be paying the same level of taxes they did in 2006-2007.

Madam Speaker, this \$570 million in infrastructure spending – we recognize that infrastructure is an investment in our province – will go to provide value for our citizens for years to come.

Before I close, Madam Speaker, I would like to comment on some of the things I have been asked. What are my issues on – personal things. What are my issues on mental illness, people in old age homes? I think our government has already proven that we are trying to take care of them the best way we can. That's why a lot of the supplements were done.

A little while ago the Member for Paradise was interviewed by *The Telegram*. He had said in this comment, we have never seen so many emails as we've seen in the past weeks and months since this budget came down. Well, I say to them, if I were on the spending spree and the shopping spree that ye were on for the last number of years, I wouldn't receive an email or anything towards it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. PARSLEY: Because, as we all know, we all have vacations, but when we come back from a vacation we have to put our fiscal house in order. In order to have our house in order, we have to go on. I know what that's like as a single woman today. I know what it's like to deal with things like mental illness, autism and personal care homes, because I've been through it all.

As far as our health care system, when my daughter walked in a few weeks ago with my grandson for an MRI and she's up waiting to get her instructions and he says, mommy, do we have to pay? And the lady says no – because she's always trying to teach him about money, you can't be spending, we can't – and the nurse says no, you don't have to pay, it's free.

Walking away myself, last week, after spending a day or two at St. Clare's and getting the treatment that I got, I know what it was like to be able to walk away and not have to worry where my money was going to come to pay for those bills.

I think as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians today, I know there's a lot in this budget that's harsh. I know there are a lot of other things, but I think when illness strikes there's nothing can compare to that, nothing in this whole world. If we can walk in and out of our health care systems and be treated as individuals 24-7 and not have to worry, like a few years ago when I had an accident in Florida – and I won't repeat the words my husband said to me what we were after the accident. I couldn't go to a hospital and have my MRI done because I wasn't sure what the insurance would cost, but here in Newfoundland and Labrador we have a first-class medical system. I know we have to wait, but in life everyone has to wait.

I will conclude by saying thank you for the opportunity that I had today to speak and let's move forward with this budget.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources.

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

It is my honour to stand here in this hon. House today and speak in favour of the main motion on the budget.

Madam Speaker, I first of all want to say that I'm very proud of the team we have on this side of the House. I'm very proud of the depth and the strength they bring to this hon. House and their work ethic and their intellect, their integrity that they bring to this House of Assembly.

When I look around at my colleagues here gathered, I see the former Chair of the Canadian Medical Association. I'm a former Chair of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce. I know the Premier is the former head of the Canadian

Pharmaceutical Association. We have business leaders, we have teachers, we have lawyers. We have so many professions and people who have contributed to the communities, mayors and councillors.

There are so many people gathered in this hon. House. I think it's been difficult over the last number of months to listen to some people who have been taking personal exception to the people on this side of the House because of some of the difficult decisions we were forced to make.

I also want to say thank you to the people who support government, the people who – what I mean by that is I meant the – I beg your pardon, Madam Speaker. The people who support the work that government does. I'm talking here about the bureaucracy. We have a tremendous number of people within the organization, within government who have spent countless hours.

Madam Speaker, I know you've been witness to some of those countless hours of people who have had to stay working late, away from their families, because they too are very interested in ensuring that we have the best budget to address the concerns we have financially for this province.

Madam Speaker, you've heard repeatedly from all sides of the House how difficult this budget is. There is no doubt, it's challenging. It's frustrating, quite frankly, Madam Speaker, that we, as a province, find ourselves in this situation.

We had peak oil price back in 2007, we had peak oil production. We've taken in approximately \$25 billion in new money – new money, Madam Speaker. Not what we normally would get in the day-to-day activities of government. We're talking about new revenues to this province. Over the last decade with peak oil and peak oil production, we've taken in the most we've ever taken in in the last decade.

Yet, during that time of what I'm going to call prosperity – because when you take in that much new money, all my colleagues would agree, everyone in this House would agree, that's a prosperous time. You know, in the last six of the

12 years of the previous government we ran deficits, Madam Speaker. Very, very difficult.

We placed last in economic growth over the last seven years – last in economic growth over the last seven years, Madam Speaker. According to Don Mills, CEO of Corporate Research, “He left the province with a structural budget problem that is going to be difficult to fix.” There's no doubt about that.

Madam Speaker, if we did nothing – you heard it time and time again. If we did nothing, our deficit this year would have been \$2.7 billion. We were able to get it down to \$1.8 billion. Now, that is still a tremendous sum of money.

Just so that we can get our minds around how big is a billion, if we look back a million seconds ago, that would have been 12 days ago. If we look back a billion seconds ago, that would have been 31 years ago. A million minutes would have been a year, 329 days, 10 hours and 40 minutes ago. A billion minutes would have been the time of Christ.

Just to give you the difference between a billion and a million, because of course we talk about these large numbers. We throw around billions and millions as if they mean something, but you really can't grasp how big a billion really, really is. Now we have an \$8.48 billion budget.

Now, Madam Speaker, to talk a little bit about our debt. It took us 66 years in this province to amass \$11 billion in debt. That's all the hospitals, all the roads, all the schools that we developed in this province over the last 66 years came to be – our bill came to \$11 billion.

Now, Madam Speaker, if we do nothing in the next five years, if we did nothing under this budget, if we kept on going the path that the former government set us on, in the next five years we would have doubled our debt. Now think about that. It took us 66 years to accumulate \$11 billion in debt, but if we had followed the path that we were on under the former administration, in the next five years, we would have doubled the debt. Madam Speaker, that's very, very difficult. We would not have been able to sustain the services in this province.

If you took you look since 2004, if you take into account our Crown corporations, the former government actually doubled our public sector debt to a record of \$15 billion. Madam Speaker, that's a heck of a lot of money. That's a heck of a lot of money.

I read with interest the article that was in *The Telegram* most recently written by Des Whelan, the president of the Board of Trade. He talked about how the health care budget has increased 142 per cent. It has gone from \$1.2 billion to \$2.9 billion. That's quite an increase; 142 per cent over the last 12 years.

The Fraser Institute put Newfoundland and Labrador last in Canada when it comes to value for money. So we're doing something, Madam Speaker, that is increasing our costs but not getting the level of services that we require. The Education budget has increased – I see the Minister of Education here – since 2000, 71 per cent. Yet, we have had a 36 per cent decrease in enrolment over the same period of time.

The Conference Board of Canada in 2014 ranked Newfoundland and Labrador a D overall. Madam Speaker, change is required to this province, definitely. Over the last decade government spending has been as high as 36 per cent per capita higher than other provinces. It's astounding, Madam Speaker.

Now, in preparing to discuss the budget, I went back and I said well, the Auditor General must have had something to say about this over the years. Surely the Auditor General must have pointed out to the Members opposite, the former government, that while the times are prosperous and while we have some windfalls with regard to the oil and gas and while we had peak oil and while we had peak production, times were good, but surely the Auditor General would have pointed out that there are concerns.

Madam Speaker, I went back to 2006. I looked up what the Auditor General said. In 2006 – I am quoting now from the Auditor General report. "... we must not lose sight of the Province's enormous debt, related debt expenses and the fact that oil is a non-renewable resource with a limited life." We have the highest net debt per capita of any province in Canada, our debt expenses totalling \$947 million. Debt

expenses from 2006 are close on \$1 billion – the highest interest costs as a percentage of total revenue of any province in Canada.

In 2006 the Auditor General said that. Well, did the Auditor General say anything else? So I skipped ahead three years. We are at peak oil production, money was rolling in, maybe they're addressing the problems so I went to 2009 and I read – and I'm quoting now from the Auditor General's report from 2009: "'Although recent surpluses may be perceived as being an abundance of money available for Government programs, Government will continue to be challenged to meet the expenditure needs of the Province, as well as the need to address its significant debt.' In particular it was noted that for each dollar of revenue in 2008, approximately 57.0 cents was allocated as follows: 10.5 cents to pay the interest on our debt (also known as the 'interest bite'); 16.6 cents spent on education, and 29.9 cents spent for health and community services."

So in 2009, we're reminded again by the Auditor General that things aren't so rosy. I skipped ahead to 2012; I'm quoting from the Auditor General's report: "Since 2003, the Province's expenses have grown from \$4.7 billion to \$7.8 billion in 2012, an increase of \$3.1 billion, or 66%. Per capita expenses in Newfoundland and Labrador are the highest in Canada. Furthermore, per capita expenses are approximately 50% higher than the average of all other provinces."

Our colleagues opposite like to talk about well, they weren't here then; some of them weren't here then. Well, I'm going to go to 2014 and 2015. The Auditor General's report: "The 2014 provincial budget presented a three year outlook which forecasted a deficit in 2014-15, followed by small surpluses in 2015-16 and 2016-17." Well, we know that that didn't happen.

I'm going to go on to quote: "The inherent volatility in commodity prices is highlighted by the current downturn in oil prices. While there is no certainty that oil prices will remain low, it does point to the risk to provincial revenue and the overall impact"

Again, in 2015 he goes on to say – the Auditor General again, Madam Speaker, "... shows a

deficit for the year of \$986 million, the largest in the Province's history"

Madam Speaker, year after year – and I could have quoted the whole 15 years of reports – the Auditor General raised the alarm, said to the former government, said to the people of the province: We're in trouble here. You better start addressing the serious situation of increasing cost, decreasing ability to pay for the cost, and, Madam Speaker, we find ourselves in this year – we find ourselves in a very difficult situation. We find ourselves in an intolerable situation because, of course, when you look at your own household finances, we know that if we've over-borrowed and we can't pay our debts, what happens.

Madam Speaker, we've had to make some very, very difficult decisions. One of those difficult decisions was the temporary levy. I want to speak to the temporary Deficit Reduction Levy. No one likes it when taxes rise. Of course no one does, no one in this province – an unenviable position that we are in, but I want to remind the people of this province that the levy is temporary. We have drawn it out and drawn attention to it so we would be held accountable to making sure that it is temporary.

Now, Madam Speaker, when I look at a comparison, and I read to you the Auditor General's report from 2006, I showed you what the Auditor General was saying. In 2006 – I want to do a comparison of the income taxes then and the income taxes that we've had to put in place, including the levy. I want to just do a comparison.

In 2006, before the former government decided to decrease levels of taxation, the personal income tax rate was 10.57 per cent for income up to \$29,590. Madam Speaker, today, with this government, the income tax on up to \$35,000 would 8.7 per cent. If we look at income between \$29,000 and \$59,000, in 2006 it was 16.16 per cent. If you look at it today for incomes between \$35,000 up to \$70,000, it's 14.5.

So what I'm illustrating, what I'm saying, what I'm telling the people of the province, the people who are listening to us, is while it's difficult, it's not impossible. We've been here before. This is

a circumstance where we have to – as my mother used to say – cut the cloth to suit the garment. We've got to start reining in our expenditures, making sure that we are spending on what's essential, what's important, what is required by the people of this province, and we have to make sure that we have the revenues to fund that.

I think the people of the province understand when I say that while we are experiencing a difficult situation today, if we continue on a secure path forward we can get things under control, we can improve the fiscal situation, we can enjoy the incredible opportunities that this province has.

Madam Speaker, just this week I had the opportunity to meet with a number of ambassadors from the European Union. They were visiting. It was an incredible opportunity to meet with 24 ambassadors from all over Europe that came to St. John's to hear about the opportunities in Newfoundland and Labrador. I had the opportunity, Madam Speaker, to talk to them about the incredible things that are happening in the mining industry.

So, as I said in this House on April 28, when I gave a Ministerial Statement where I talked about some of the things that are happening, Canadian Fluorspar, the expansion of IOC into Wabush 3, some of the things that are happening with the underground mine in Vale. I was explaining to them some of the incredible opportunities. Madam Speaker, in this budget we did allocate money to continue to do the geological survey of the province, and some of the opportunities that there are in gold and other types of mining around the province. They were very interested and enthusiastic, actually, in the opportunities that abound.

Then I had the opportunity to spend an afternoon with them going over the prospectivity of our offshore oil and gas. They were amazed to learn that we have 350 leads in our offshore; that we have developments in the Jeanne D'Arc basin; that we have opportunity in the Flemish Pass basin; that we had interest of about \$1.2 billion last year in terms of work commitments in offshore oil and gas for offshore Newfoundland and Labrador.

They looked around our province and they saw the wealth and opportunity that's here. Madam Speaker, I can tell you I am enthusiastic. I am not just enthusiastic, I am hopeful, I think we are blessed to live in this province.

I know, Madam Speaker, you have to look towards the Member opposite who's making some interesting remarks across the way.

Madam Speaker, we should be hopeful in this province. When I look around the globe, and I've been fortunate to travel a little bit and have the opportunity to visit other countries. It is amazing the opportunities that lie in our province. The wealth and abundance of natural resources, the ingenuity of our people. We are known globally for a lot of innovation around cold water, harsh environments, around ocean technologies. It is astounding some of the work that is being done here.

Madam Speaker, there is a lot of opportunity and future prosperity and wealth in this province. We just need to harness that energy. I'm not just talking now about offshore oil and gas. I'm talking about the energy of the people. We could do so much in this province.

We're talking about the budget. I know in the Department of Natural Resources, for example, Madam Speaker, we've made some investments this year to ensure the mining industry. We have added to the Mineral Incentive Program with an additional \$100,000 for the Junior Exploration Assistance program for the next three years. We want to make sure and encourage the continued development and growth in the mining sector.

I announced today in my Ministerial Statement how we're doing a prospectors course. I also want to point out, Madam Speaker, in this budget we've allocated money for a province-wide geological survey. We've been doing this for many years. We are going to continue to do this because that's what brings opportunity to this province.

We also invested in orphaned and abandoned mines. Last year there was precious little, but we think it's very important in this province to make sure we have a safety program for the environmental protection and for public health and safety. We've allocated \$300,000 this year

in a \$2.4 million program over multiple years to make sure that we have orphaned and abandoned mines are well secure.

Madam Speaker, what I'm saying, that I want to point out, is how much we've invested in this province and how much we're going to continue to invest in this province to harness the activity, to harness the potential to ensure the ingenuity of our people.

This budget may be difficult for people, but it's not impossible. This budget may cause people to pause and say, oh, I don't want to go back to a 2006 or a 2007 tax level. But we know we can get through this, Madam Speaker, and we'll be that much better off.

I also want to point out some of the other – oh, I see my time is running out. I'll have to take a future opportunity to talk more about the opportunities in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member her time for speaking has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'm proud to stand to talk to the main motion of the budget; proud of the thought and the effort that's gone in on behalf of caucus and Cabinet to craft what has been a difficult budget. There's no doubt about it.

To start to deal with some of the comments from the opposite side, there is a vision in this budget, contrary to what some would say. The problem has been there are none as blind as those who will not see. There is also a plan to achieve that vision, despite the comments to the contrary. That vision is quite clearly one of fiscal sustainability. The plan is a seven-year plan to get from the mess to there.

We had – as my colleague pointed out a few moments ago – a period of peak oil production and a period of peak oil price, 2006-2007. Both have passed and will not come this way again. You only have to look to the situation in the Middle East to realize that our contribution to the global oil market is not going to make a significant difference in prices. We are subject to the whims of what is essentially a volatile market. We need, as a province and as a government, to move away from reliance on volatility and volatile commodities.

We also have to reverse a culture of spending, which has seized the previous administration, and avoid the sprees like we saw in the period of 2006 to 2015, when like a bunch of drunken sailors on Water Street at night, they managed to get through \$25 billion in 10 years.

Budget '16 sets out the road to a balanced budget in seven years. It restores confidence with prudent management and sensible spending. The credibility of that plan has been acknowledged by independent voices, contrary, again, to what the Opposition parties would have us believe. The Member for Stephenville – Port au Port made great play of that in his eloquent speech on the subject.

The independent voices are those of the bond-rating agencies and the syndicates that lend money to provinces. Had the province not acted in a decisive and clear way, the penalties would have been swift and severe. You've seen the consequences for dilatory action in places like Alberta. We have need of a certain sum of money and we need to pay as little as possible for it. By providing a clear plan and a way forward, we have achieved both of those, the ability to borrow what we need and at rates which are competitive and affordable.

Having said that, we still in the abysmal situation, left from the previous government, where we actually have to spend \$983 million in this coming year just simply to service the debt, to pay the interest on the mortgage that they took out on behalf of every man, woman and child in this province.

The Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune said, well, why don't we go and borrow like the feds? I would point out that some simple

arithmetic would point out that the \$30 billion debt she proposes for Canada would be spread over a population of 35 million people. We currently have a debt somewhere in the order of 80 times that magnitude already, and she's proposing to suggest we borrow more.

The Third Party had a suggestion that we should increase borrowing by 100 per cent over what we have suggested. These are totally unrealistic and unsustainable ideas. So we have to find what we can afford, what we need and what we can get in terms of value for money.

We go back to the debt; \$983 million in debt costs this year, whereas we can only afford \$890 million on children's education. The level of taxation has been a stick they've tried to beat us with, but essentially it goes back to those levels before the spending spree began in earnest.

In actual fact, given the magnitude of our debt, it's not unreasonable. What is unreasoned and unreasonable has been the cherry-picking we've seen in the debates and in Question Period when the media are here to highlight the weakness of their previous planning and try and cast the blame for the financial mess on to this side of the House when we are actually doing a really creditable job of dealing with it.

The tax package has been dissected. It has been taken apart and they have tried to portray each of these components as evils when, in actual fact, the sum of these components is greater together than the component parts. Taken together, it's a comprehensive package. Not like the utopia party over there would have us do, which is to borrow another 100 per cent on what we have already, with no plan as to how to spend it reasonably and no conceivable way of ever paying it back.

It's a comprehensive policy based on taxation levels that are realistic, given our level of revenue. The temporary levy, which they love to decry, is part of a package; it goes straight on the deficit reduction. That's what it's there for. It goes straight to that and not into the pot of general revenue. It's pitched specifically – contrary to the information opposite – to exclude the lowest 38 per cent of incomes in this province. Of those people who do pay, 43 per cent of them would be paying less than \$1 a day.

In 2018, it will go down. It's in there. It's in the plan. It will be gone by the end of this seven-year plan, at which point we will be in balance and fiscally sustainable, because we're not going to make the same mistakes they made, spending money we haven't got and can't afford to borrow.

Contrary, again, to what the Members opposite would have you believe, that is clear. It is open. It is in the budget document. It's there in Estimates. Again, none so blind as those who will not see.

We have taken, in addition, specific measures to deal with the challenges that vulnerable groups are presented with in life. We have new supplements for seniors and for low income. It depends on taxable income, not gross, as the folk on the other side of the House would try and make out. The supplements are phased out at income levels which start to reflect the cost of living, again, taxable income.

The problem has been, there has been so much obfuscation and disinformation propagated by the Members opposite, who throw out incomes and dire predictions. These measures are robust and the fog they create over there is deliberate and based on laziness when it suits their political short-term goals.

The Minister of Finance has responded to their half-truths with facts. Yet, they choose to be hard of hearing when it comes to those facts. They talk of \$3,000 extra in taxes. They pull these figures out of the air. Well, \$3,000 extra in taxes, Madam Speaker, equates to purchasing \$150,000 of HST liable purchases in a year. Alternatively, it's 24,000 litres of gasoline or three million litres of aviation fuel. I'm not sure that a typical expenditure of anybody in this province.

The measures are crucial in terms of taxation, but equally crucial are expenditure measures. Long term, the very nature of expenditure measures is that they are slower.

The Members opposite, particularly the Third Party, went to town on the subject of rationale. Well, rationale, as I said the other day, is the exposition of reason. It's a very topical word from them, but the rationale here – the exposure

to reason – is the fact that our books have not balanced and could not balance with the policy of the previous government. They do and they will with this. My grandson is not going to be saddled with \$53,000 on his head, along with every other man, woman and child in this province because they could only think about spending and borrowing. It won't happen.

Spending wisely is often spending less. So, as a government, we were put in power to make some decisions. We have a responsibility to decide what is it we need, what is it we want and what is it we can afford. Those three pockets meet together in a venn diagram, and in the middle is determined what we as a government can do as policy. We're not here to talk about frills. One could argue on a philosophical basis whether that's the role of government too.

Progressive program spending has not really been addressed or critically reviewed in any serious way over the last few years. We've heard from the Minister of Education and the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills, and every department about the challenges they were left with.

Over the last decade programs have been added willy-nilly, without any thought and with absolutely no evaluation built in. My own department consumes currently 38 per cent of the provincial budget; 38 cents of every dollar, Madam Speaker. It is simply not sustainable, yet the interesting thing is when I went out to visit the regional health authorities at the beginning of this year, sat down and talked to them about what their challenges were with a group of trustees in every board who were time expired and were serving until replacements could be produced through the appointment system we agreed on yesterday, these members of the board could not recall ever having seen a Minister of Health. They have been in post between three and six years. They could never recall being asked or invited by a Minister of Health, as board of trustees, to meet with the Minister of Health, none of them.

So doing business the same way simply because we've always done it doesn't make sense. Indeed a famous scientist once said doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result is a form of insanity.

AN HON. MEMBER: Looney.

MR. HAGGIE: Yes, thank you.

My argument is within my own department, and I hear it around discussions I have with colleagues, is why on earth do you keep doing things, not only when there is no supporting evidence, but there's actually evidence to the contrary that these things are potentially ineffective. It's become a part of the previous government's culture that you simply do not do anything critically; you simply get in there, spend first and think later. My own department had an advertising campaign which cost \$200,000 and was predicated on dancing mammals actually attracting people to use a health line. As the people concerned said, Minister, that really wasn't our demographic, I think, was the kindest way of putting it.

We had the wonderful example of a come-home campaign to repatriate Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, vast amounts of money put into it and then someone thought that perhaps airing it in Newfoundland and Labrador wasn't going to be terribly productive and the whole thing was canned. Money spent, money wasted, no gain. Spend first, think later.

The Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune loved to castigate me over changes to the provincial low-risk breast cancer screening program. My response to her and my response to them is still, why when the previous ministers of health, some of which sit on the opposite side – the previous ministers of health had access to the same information I had for five years. For five years, Madam Deputy Speaker, they choose to continue to fund something for which there was no evidence.

We have to examine what we do through the lens of what is needed versus what we want, what we can afford and what we can't and where the evidence lies. So folk over there would have you believe that this is not a budget with any investment. That is simply not the case. We have an investment for seniors and aging in this province. We have a sensible plan to look at long-term care as part of an organized, programmatic approach based on placements, not knee-jerk, let's build some beds.

We had a plan that was derived when I was in another capacity –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Speaker is having trouble hearing the Member.

Thank you.

MR. HAGGIE: – through Central Health, for example, which had an integrated, long-term care strategy for aging in place, rehabilitation and all the services were needed. Yet because it didn't fit with the ideology opposite, no one did anything with it. They went out to some buddies and said let's have a tender to put some long-term care beds here and here. It was flawed from the get-go. One of our first decisions as government was to take that off the table and try to find the money to make sure that we did it properly this time, instead of as a knee-jerk.

We have a need for community programs to support those things so that people can age in place and we can reduce the demand for the high-level, specialized long-term care that is the goal or had been the goal of the previous government, and the only answer. We put money in the budget for new drugs, but I challenge the Members opposite – that money has been going in for years – what's ever come off the formulary? Nothing, it just got bigger and bigger, and no one has done any due diligence about what is it we need, what is it we want, and why we are spending our money on stuff that is outmoded and no longer best practice.

In health, we know that more care is not better care, it is simply more care, and it's more expensive and nobody gains. We have to engage with the patients of this province, the people of this province and with the care providers to work through practice issues. What is appropriate care? What is appropriate use of diagnostics? Those are areas, for example, in which there is a vast literature already there where we could save 25 to 35 per cent in diagnostic imaging and laboratory services alone, Madam Speaker – just those two areas. That may not result into any immediate savings, particularly with diagnostic imaging, but it

would abolish the wait-list in any substantial way. Yet again, none of that has been addressed.

So in terms of investment, there were comments again made on the other side about a lack. But again, there are none as blind as those who will not see; \$574 million of money into infrastructure, we're leveraging from the federal government. This will generate 1,000 jobs a year over the next four years. Could we have done more? I doubt it. The important thing is that we have not done less. We have penny-pinched and saved where we could, and we have put money into things that will generate revenue and work for this province in difficult times.

So again, Madam Deputy Speaker, I just reiterate the fact that this is a difficult budget, but contrary to what the Members opposite would say, there is both a vision of where we need to go and a plan to get there. The facts of the case are that cherry-picking on the other side does not make that any different.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, from my point of view, I ask for the support of the House in this budget, which I think is a very creditable performance, given the abysmal mess we were left to face.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BYRNE: Well, there you go. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I'd like to take the moments I have available to me to introduce to the House a very important budget item that was in *Budget 2016*, which is the \$8.5 million that was allocated for the completion – not the continuation, but the completion of the Western Memorial Regional Hospital planning study.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BYRNE: Madam Speaker, it cannot be left unsaid that there are concerns on the West Coast

of exactly what is the status of this particular project. In fact when the people consider that over \$50 million will be spent by the end of this fiscal year on planning or site preparation for a hospital design which is not even ready to tender as of yet, it is only fair and reasonable that there would be questions.

Well, Madam Speaker, those questions are shared by everyone on this side because, of course, as we went into this, in the lead up to the election campaign, there was no signs that there was any troubles or issues; in fact, the former government simply said that the construction of the Western Memorial Hospital was on track and on time and on budget. It was probably the 25th or 26th time that they had said that, but nonetheless there was a commitment that was given that all was well.

Madam Speaker, when we formed the government on December 14 and were able to look at some of the documentation, some of the issues, some of the evidence surrounding exactly the status of this hospital and the \$42 million that had been spent at that point in time, we knew all was definitely not well. In fact, Madam Speaker, we discovered very quickly that there was no capacity for the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to proceed with a tender, to proceed with a build opportunity to get the project, to get steel in the ground as a former member from my district once said, in a timely fashion.

By the time this is all said and done, \$50 million will be spent; \$25 million approximately on site infrastructure, which many affectionately call one of the largest dog parks in Western Newfoundland because there is no particular function for it at this point in time, and \$25 million on studies. How did we get to this point?

Well, Madam Speaker, I'll attempt to walk you through some of that particular narrative, some of those facts and some of those inalienable truths. On October of 2007 the Williams government announced that Corner Brook would benefit from the construction of a full service replacement hospital for Western Memorial. Now, in October of 2007, the reason why that decision was taken presumably was because the current hospital was in a state of disrepair; that was nine years ago. With no hospital available to

replace it, it is in a greater state of disrepair. The need could never be better or greater.

An interesting element of that particular budget decision in October 2007 was that government announced a total budget envelope of \$142 million to achieve the project, to achieve the goal. Now, Madam Speaker, anyone would know that at \$142 million this was woefully inadequate and underestimated the actual cost of the project.

It is an important and relevant point, because from that moment onward the PC government was engaged in an exercise to try to put the toothpaste back into the tube. They knew that at \$142 million, the project could not be completed as budgeted. They had to – in their own words – rightsize it. We know what that means.

Two years later, in January 2008, there was some progress when AMEC consultants were contracted for site evaluation at a contract cost of \$120,000. By April 30, 2009, Hatch Mott MacDonald and Agnew Peckham consultants were contracted to produce a master plan, a functional plan, which would be followed by a predesigned series of studies for the future of the hospital. The contract price of that contract: \$1.6 million.

There was a hospital master plan that was delivered by those consultants in late 2009. There was a functional plan that was delivered in 2010. Then there was an estimated project completion cost, which was kept relatively secret, tagged at \$800 million – not \$142 million, \$800 million.

In September 2010, the government, however, asserts that construction will indeed begin in 2012 and will be completed in 2016. Now when you're \$668 million short in a budget which represents five times more expense, you can understand why there might be some concerns; however, those concerns were never adequately voiced to the public, or for that matter to themselves.

With that as a backdrop, concern mounted and in November 2011 a second set of engineers was then hired. Stantec Consulting engineers were brought in to do due diligence work on the Hatch Mott MacDonald's \$1.6 million worth of

work. This contract cost \$177,000 extra. Stantec offered up a series of redesigned considerations and suggestions.

In August 2012, Stantec was called in again to redesign and redeliver a brand new master plan. Contract cost for that particular initiative, an additional \$205,000. However, government put this aside as simply saying we are confirming the hospital, we are just simply rightsizing it.

In March of 2013, Stantec delivers a new master plan for the Corner Brook hospital that includes 160 acute care beds – which is down from the 199 which are currently in the building – 100 long-term beds, plus 48 hostel beds. Anticipated construction cost by this engineering firm comes in, not an exact figure but a range. They suggest it will cost \$588 million, give or take 30 per cent either way.

So in other words, either \$411.6 million or \$764.4 million. In reply to this figure the Premier announces \$227 million is in Budget 2013 to build a hospital, which is already known internally by the government to have a construction cost of \$411 million or \$764 million, or somewhere in between. Stantec is then contracted to deliver a second functional plan for the hospital. The contract price for this: an additional \$1 million.

By September of 2013, government decides to proceed with a specific development program called the design-build approach. Transportation and Works is directed to develop two separate packages for construction. Package one being a long-term care facility, and package two an acute care facility. A wise path to take, given the fact that alleviation of the long-term care concerns and needs would go a long way in being able to deliver a functional and highly efficient and effective acute care hospital.

Package one is to consist of 120 long-term care beds in a design-build approach, which specifically, Madam Speaker, would include facilities for a food service kitchen, with capability to provide food services for both the long-term care and the acute care hospital. It would include restorative care units, a rehabilitative care unit and a palliative care unit, which obviously have a direct connection and synergy with a long-term care facility.

Now bear in mind, Madam Speaker, a restorative care unit, a rehabilitative care unit, and a palliative care unit – both very important and essential, publicly available, publicly-funded health care units and facilities would be part of the long-term care facility in the PC's September 2013 plan. Then an acute care hospital would take up phase 2 with a 48 bed hospital attached.

December 28, 2013 – I understand to be the date – Transportation and Works issues a request for qualifications and a request for proposals on a design build based on the above, with those specific publicly-funded, publicly-available and public administered health care facilities of palliative, restorative care included.

Madam Speaker, we're already getting into a time when there is an expectation growing within the people of the West Coast and all those who would use the hospital, that a PET scanner, which is the emerging technology for diagnostics and selected radiation and cancer care treatments, should indeed be included in the facility. The PET scanner and radiation therapy debate goes to a head from July of 2013. It escalates right to the point of the issuing of the RFP in December and continues on until April of 2014.

Madam Speaker, may I simply point out as a matter of record, that the hon. Member for Humber – Bay of Islands was a key proponent of these facilities and really brought this debate to its head. He was the one who really took charge and identified not only the need but the technical feasibility to this initiative and this endeavour.

In August of 2013, however, the Health Minister of the day did not agree. Instead, suggesting that radiation therapy as proposed, that would be offered in Corner Brook, would result in patient harm. Radiation therapy would result in patient harm.

The Official Opposition, however, providing evidence led by the hon. Member for Humber Valley at the time, and the hon. Member for Bay of Islands at the time, put forward the notion this was misguided in its rhetoric and that such facilities are becoming standard model for inclusion in smaller, progressive secondary health care institutions, and models were given.

It resulted in the government reversing itself and announcing the inclusion of select radiation therapy, and the Health care minister was shuffled.

Government, however, after having announced this, proceed with hiring an Alberta consultant to investigate the feasibility of the decision they had already taken. So the government announced a \$500,000 contract to an Alberta company to investigate whether or not indeed radiation therapy was feasible, after announcing that it would continue to occur.

Now, progress was being made in July of 2014, Madam Speaker, with the Corner Brook Care Team. The CBCT joint venture was awarded with both the design-build development packages, with an initial consulting cost of \$12 million. CBCT is a joint venture between B+H Architects, Montgomery Sisam Architects, PCL Contractors and Marco Construction, Madam Speaker, for the record.

In July of 2014 to April 2015, CBCT focuses on the design-build package for, number one, the long-term care facility, with an understanding that the long-term care would be first out of the gate. Again, this includes a food service kitchen large enough for both the long-term care and the acute care facility. It also was to include restorative care, rehabilitative care and palliative care in the long-term care facility.

Madam Speaker, this is where it really, really gets interesting, because again the PC government then reverses itself in April of 2015 for yet another time. It reverses itself and decides to proceed with an RFP on a design-build-operate for the long-term care package only. Now, this has a significance and relevance because of course what is in the privately design, build and operated facility, what is designed to be in that institution, but rehab, restorative and palliative care.

So with that said, the Corner Brook Care Team is ordered to stop planning the design build of the long-term care component of their contract and change orders, I understand, are issued to direct the Corner Brook Care Team to redirect and concentrate on the acute care package exclusively and to reincorporate previously

removed project components of food services, rehab, restorative and palliative care.

Now, Madam Speaker, this is all occurring at point when Intermediate crude was still trading at \$110 a barrel. Following the review of the functional plan by Western Memorial's department heads, other changes were also then incorporated, including location of the intensive care and the footprint of the diagnostic imaging centre.

This new direction means that, Madam Speaker, additional redesign work would be required to reincorporate these services, those important publicly available health care services, back into the acute care plan. These change orders result in additional redesign and additional consulting costs, but the end result is that the government goes away from offering additional funds and simply scales back the product that the Corner Brook Care Team was to provide and it goes from being a detailed design package to a schematic design only.

Now, this is an important point, Madam Speaker, because when they do that by going to a schematic design only, that's where the capacity to be able to go to tender is functionally stopped. That occurred prior to March 2015. Yet, in the *Budget 2015*, the PC government puts out the following message to the media and to the public and registered on the public website of the Department of Health: Question in its FAQ section: Will the continuation of the Corner Brook hospital be impacted by declining oil revenues? Answer: The decline in oil revenues will not impact on the continuation of this project. Government has committed to constructing a new hospital in Corner Brook and we will deliver on that promise.

There is just one problem, Madam Speaker, what they did not inform any of us, anyone in the public, was that all future funding for the Corner Brook hospital was removed from the multi-year fiscal forecast in *Budget 2015*.

The PC government continues to insist that the hospital is proceeding. In the course of the election of 2015, the PCs promised the hospital is still proceeding. It is still going to be built, they stated during the election campaign. It wasn't until quite after the election campaign in

January 2016 in an interview with, I believe, *The Western Star* at the time, the now Opposition Leader, former premier, criticizes the Liberal government for consideration of proceeding with Western Memorial at a time when oil revenues are so low.

Madam Speaker, this is where we are today. We have a design schematic only. We do not have something which can go to tender. The entire fiscal framework, the entire funding for the project was removed from the budget in 2015, without any announcement or public acknowledgement. We went into the summer and fall and into the general election with the former government stating – as if it were a statement of fact – this project is proceeding regardless. Never saying, never telling, never informing that they had removed from the fiscal framework all funds related to this project.

Then we have them going into the election campaign saying it's business as usual. Then in January 2016, there was a revelation that the current administration should never ever consider doing this project because oil revenues are so low.

Well, Madam Speaker, we can inform this House – as we did the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and in particular to the users of this facility that need it so badly – it was needed in 2007 when the decision was taken to replace it. It had issues back then. It is now nine years later. It has even greater issues today. We allocated \$8.5 million to be able to complete this project. Yes, that is a lot of money. It is not a simple continuation of the same old, same old. It is not a continuation of planning; it is a completion of the plan.

Madam Speaker, that story had to be told on the floor of this House, and I appreciate it very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

Given the hour of the day, with the consent of the opposite House Leaders, I would suggest we recess for supper.

MADAM SPEAKER: This House now stands in recess until 7 p.m.