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*Speaker: Honourable Tom Osborne, MHA*

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The House met at 2:00 p.m.

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

Admit strangers.

I would like to welcome to the Speaker's gallery today Joan Collins, Kevin Collins and Betty Collins, who are relatives of former MHA Harold Collins who is the subject of a Member's statement.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** As well, I would like to welcome to our public galleries 45 grade four and five students from Vanier Elementary, accompanied by their teachers Ashleigh Hudson and Michael Seviour. They are also the subject of a statement today.

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

#### Statements by Members

**MR. SPEAKER:** Today for Members' statements we have the Members for the District of Lewisporte – Twillingate, Fogo Island – Cape Freels, Conception Bay East – Bell Island, Placentia West – Bellevue, Virginia Waters – Pleasantville and Topsail – Paradise.

I understand request for leave was approved by both sides for the Member for Topsail – Paradise for a statement that's a little more lengthy, for the members in our Speaker's gallery.

The hon. the Member for the District of Lewisporte – Twillingate.

**MR. D. BENNETT:** Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House to recognize the Calypso Foundation in Lewisporte. The Calypso Foundation was officially established in 1977 to assist individuals with disabilities in the transition from their present environment to a more inclusive social and employment environment, which would assist them to become more independent.

Almost 40 years later, the foundation is still going strong, providing services to 27 clients. The foundation has two main components: the Work Oriented Rehabilitation Centre, which is

designed to assist individuals with disabilities to acquire the skills, experience and support necessary to get into the workforce; secondly, the Living Skills Program – which is operated solely on donations and fundraising efforts – provides guidance and instruction to individuals with severe disabilities, helping them to gain personal and life skills that creates self-worth and a higher level of independence.

On May 6, I had the privilege of attending the 31st annual auction for their Living Skills Program. I am pleased to say that the auction raised in excess of \$15,000 –

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

**MR. D. BENNETT:** – thanks to the generous support of residents and the business community.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating the Calypso Foundation in Lewisporte for all their success and the great service they provide to Lewisporte area.

Thank you.

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

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

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

It is my pleasure to rise in this hon. House today to congratulate the Central Loopers under-17 volleyball team on a successful tournament this past weekend in Saskatoon. After a somewhat rocky start on day one, the team, comprised of players from New-Wes-Valley, Hare Bay and Gander, went on to win all four of their last four games, eventually taking home the gold medal in their tier four division.

The 12 members of the team were accompanied by their head coach Craig Loder, assistant coach Dean Goulding, as well as many supportive parents who travelled to watch them play.

However, Mr. Speaker, the fun didn't end there as during their stopover in Toronto they had the opportunity to meet and chat with hockey legend, number 99, Wayne Gretzky. It is events

such as these where our young athletes make lasting memories and life-long friends, in addition to maintaining a healthy and active lifestyle.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating the Central Loopers on an amazing tournament and wishing them the best of luck in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

I stand to congratulate a group of students from St. Michael's High on Bell Island. Yesterday, I and hundreds of thousands of Canadians had the privilege of watching students from the school do a great job performing traditional NL music and dance live on *Canada AM*.

The students were invited to perform on the *Canada AM* show that was broadcast live from St. John's yesterday. The students played a number of musical instruments such as the fiddle, accordion, guitar and performed one of our own traditional dances.

These talented students enjoy performing so much that they constantly perform for fellow students and groups to ensure our traditional music and dance is not forgotten. Along with the students, teachers of St. Michael's High played an important role in teaching music and dance to the students.

I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the volunteer contributions to the group by Order of Canada recipient and Bell Island resident Kelly Russell, who not only serves as the volunteer coordinator for the group, but teaches traditional music and dance to the students.

I congratulate and thank the students, staff and Kelly for being ambassadors for Bell Island and our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**MR. BROWNE:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to extend the warmest of wishes to Mrs. Hazel Baker who recently celebrated 100 years.

Just this past Friday, at the Marystown Retirement Centre, the building filled with family and friends from near and far to celebrate this milestone. Never had such a crowd been seen at the retirement centre.

Mrs. Baker was born in Harbour Buffett, Placentia Bay, but spent most of her time in Epworth. She's the third youngest of eight children, and has maintained a busy lifestyle of Newfoundland and Labrador traditions including rug hooking, mat making, mat poking, in addition to knitting socks and mitts for her many family and friends.

Throughout her life, she has been a strong volunteer for her church and a regular in the church choir.

I ask all hon. Member to join me in wishing Mrs. Hazel Baker – a woman whose smile is never far – a happy 100th birthday and best wishes for continued health and happiness.

Thank you.

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

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

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

I rise in this hon. House today to congratulate a group of remarkable students and teachers in my district. Vanier Elementary's grade four and five classes, along with their teachers, Ashleigh Hudson and Michael Seviour, have worked tirelessly to get shoppers to kick their bag habit.

On Saturday, January 23, the students went to Sobeys, Howley Estates, and were able to get over 200 people commit to shop with reusable bags, which were provided to them. The event was a huge success. It was wonderful to see the

students get so involved in bettering our community.

Since that event, the students have been working hard to educate their peers on environmental issues by sharing “Green News” every morning on the school announcements. The grade four and five students also produce podcasts on many world issues that include environmentalism. Finally, the class has begun work composting for Vanier’s community garden so that others can plant flowers, herbs and other plants there.

I ask all hon. Members in this House to join me in congratulating Vanier Elementary’s grade four and five classes for their commitment to protecting our environment.

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

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

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

I thank all hon. Members for leave today to present this Member’s statement.

On November 10 of last year, we lost a former Member of the House of Assembly, the former Member for Gander, Mr. Harold Collins. Born almost exactly 91 years ago – it would have been on May 21, 1925 this coming Saturday. He was raised in Indian Islands in Notre Dame Bay. He later worked and travelled extensively in Newfoundland and Labrador with the Department of Posts and Telegraphs and, after Confederation, with the Canadian National Communications, which brought him to Gander in his formative years, where he took a lead role in many aspects of the town.

Elected in Gander in a by-election in 1967 and in three subsequent general elections, he served with Premier Frank Moores in the Cabinet posts of Municipal Affairs and Housing, Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture, Health, Rehabilitation and Recreation, Social Services, and Consumer Affairs and Environment. He later served as the province’s Chief Protocol Officer and as Chair of the Canadian Fisheries Support Board. An avid hunter, he aptly entitled his 2004 autobiography *Always a Straight Shooter*, which well described his own character.

Among other things, Minister Collins proposed the groundbreaking Royal Commission on municipal government. He brought universal suffrage, the right to vote, to the City of St. John’s, where before you had to be a landowner in order to vote. He established the Fishing Industry Advisory Board and the Marine Service Program. He expanded the Fisheries Loan Board; prepared for the establishment of the 200-mile limit; opened the Health Sciences Centre.

He transitioned the old General Hospital into the Miller Centre. He transitioned the former US Air Force hospital in Goose Bay into the International Grenfell Association. He opened the new Waterford and the first Detoxification Centre in our province; the Twillingate hospital. He enlarged Western Memorial Hospital, and the first of its kind, the Corner Brook seniors’ care centre in the former hospital.

For more on his work and his love for outport Newfoundland and Labrador, people should certainly pick up a copy of his book.

Among his 10 children, Kevin, who serves with the Information Management Division of the House of Assembly, is with us today, as well as his sister, Betty, and also their mom. We express sympathy to Joan and the entire family, and we honour Harold Collins for a lifetime of service to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Before I recognize the Member for Honour 100, I was given a note a little earlier as well. We have in our public galleries the provincial President of the Newfoundland and Labrador 50+ Federation, Robert Rogers along with Regional Director Sam Saunders.

Welcome to our House.

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

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Today for Honour 100, we have the Member for the District of Mount Pearl – Southlands.

**MR. LANE:** 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 or the Newfoundland Mercantile Marine. This will be followed by a moment of silence.

Lest we forget: William Pennell, Alexander Penney, Augustus Penney, Josiah H. Penney, Sim Penney, Arthur Joseph Penny, Isaac Penny, Robert Penny, Simeon T. Penny, William Edward Penny, William H. Penny, Ignatius Penton, H. N. Peppas, William G. Perran, Alfred Perry, Percy Perry, Reuben Oliver Perry, Warrick Perry, Philip Petite, Joseph Peyton, Stephen Peyton, James Phelan, William A. Phelan, William Francis Phelan, George Phillips, Robert Phillips, Francis Picco, Martin Picco, Berkeley Piercey, Charlie A. Piercey, John Charles Piercey, Edward Pieroway, Francis Pike, George Edward Pike, James Joseph Pike, Manuel Edward Pike, Rendle Anthony Pike, Stanley Gordon Pike, Richard B. Pilgrim and Stanley Stewart Pinsent.

(Moment of silence.)

**MR. SPEAKER:** Please be seated.

Statements by Ministers.

#### Statements by Ministers

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Government House Leader and Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

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

It was an honour for me this morning to have an opportunity to speak at the International Police and Peace Officer Memorial Service at the Seventh Day Adventist Church in St. John's. I'd also like to thank my colleagues, the Member for Baie Verte – Green Bay, and the Leader of the Official Opposition, who were both present for the same service this morning.

For generations in Newfoundland and Labrador, brave women and men have been eager to answer the call to serve and protect our

communities. Police and peace officers often work for long hours in dangerous and unpredictable environments, and their selflessness and courage benefits each and every one of us.

Sometimes, though, answering that call can result in tragedy and while ceremonies like the one today are important, it is unfortunate that we have to gather for such an occasion. One life lost is certainly one too many, but when you consider that there have been 20 police and peace officers who have lost their lives in the line of duty in our province since 1861, the risks they face each and every day become all too real.

Fortunately in Newfoundland and Labrador, we have a high level of co-operation and collaboration between our various law enforcement agencies. These close-knit organizations look out for and support each other. I'd like to let them know that they have the support of our government as well.

I thank our police and peace officers for the critical work they do in making our province one of the greatest places in the world in which to live. I wish each and every one of them a safe return home at the end of their shift.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. Again today, and as he mentioned, I had the pleasure and honour to attend the service this morning – one that I've attended numerous times over the last number of years. Of course, being a former police officer, it brings home much of what the minister referenced to me and people who I've known, and their families, especially, who have been impacted by the work they do.

I think it's always important for us to remember those who serve the community, especially those who lose their life through service to the

community, through their service to others, and they should always be remembered and we should always reflect upon that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

I, too, thank all the police and peace officers for their dedicated service and generosity. Their work really is a calling, not simply a job.

One hundred and twenty RNC officers are able to retire soon, and only 20 new cadets are graduating this year. Our support must ensure a strong transition of knowledge and experience from one generation of these most dedicated people to the next. It ensures their safety and the safety of all our communities.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**MR. MITCHELMORE:** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in this House today to acknowledge the success of two local artists, writer Chad Pelley and film maker Mark Hoffe.

Mr. Speaker, the screen adaptation of Mr. Pelley's first novel, *Away from Everywhere*, is being featured at the Cannes Film Festival this month as part of Telefilm Canada's Perspective Canada Program. The novel was adapted for the screen by Mr. Hoffe and shot in St. John's last spring.

Telefilm Canada's annual program showcases 10 recent Canadian films at the Marché du Film, which runs parallel to the famous film festival, giving them exposure to an international network of buyers, sellers and producers.

*Away from Everywhere* tells the story of two brothers brought together by mental illness and

tragedy. Directed by Justin Simms, Jason Priestley stars as the older brother Alex, with Wabush native Shawn Doyle playing his younger brother, Owen. Bay d'Espoir's Joanne Kelly, along with two young actors – Grace Keeping of Conception Bay South and Emmajane Donnan from St. John's – also had roles in the film. Producers include Barbara Doran of Morag Loves Company and Brad Gover, a partner in Mad Mummer Media.

The novel *Away from Everywhere* was published by Breakwater Books in 2009.

Mr. Speaker, our government is proud to support this project and the film and television industry in our province through the Newfoundland and Labrador Film Development Corporation. We are also pleased to provide support to publishing companies through our Publishers Assistance Program.

I wish all of those involved with the project continued success.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**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 his statement this afternoon. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Official Opposition, I'd like to extend congratulations to writer Mr. Chad Pelley and film maker Mr. Mark Hoffe, on having their film chosen as one of 10 Canadian films featured at Marché du Film. This truly is a remarkable achievement.

I'd also like to congratulate the director, actors, producers and supporters of this project: Justin Simms, Jason Priestley, Shawn Doyle, Joanne Kelly, Grace Keeping, Emmajane Donnan, Barbara Doran and Brad Gover. The dedication that these individuals have for their craft is clearly evident. It's my hope that they enjoy immense exposure and success at the Telefilm Canada showcase.

Mr. Speaker, our province is full of talent. We have talented singers, dancers, actors, directors, writers and producers. Our province has exported this talent for years. It's my hope that this continues well into the future.

However, I'd like to point out that while the minister proclaims the government's support for the film industry, this year's budget is reducing the programming grant to the Newfoundland and Labrador Film Development Corporation –

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

**MR. KENT:** – by over \$1.3 million. I hope that our industries can continue to thrive despite these government cuts.

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

The Member's time for speaking has expired.

**MR. KENT:** Thank you.

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

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

**MS. ROGERS:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

What an incredible success we celebrate here today. *Away from Everywhere* is the culmination of the brilliant work of many of our artists, from Chad Pelley's brilliant works, to Justin Simms's visionary direction; to musicians, actors, cinematographers, technicians, producers and more. This is a perfect example of how investment in the arts creates wonderful economic opportunity and feeds our souls and imaginations at the same time.

Bravo to the whole team!

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

### Oral Questions

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

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

Mr. Speaker, during the lead up to the election last fall the Premier went on the record and said they have a plan and the people will like it. Well, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador clearly are not responding well to the Liberal plan. In fact, they don't like it.

Students, seniors, hardworking low- and middle-income families, academics, community leaders, their own MHAs, their own Liberal advisors are saying they don't like the plan.

I ask the Premier: Will you listen to all of these people and put a stop to the Liberal levy?

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, speaking of plans and going into the last election, we all know what the former premier ran on. Indeed, that was not a plan at all. It was just actual information that wasn't even factual. What we put forward to the people of the province was similar in terms of – with an expectation of where this year's deficit would be based on financial information that was provided to us by the former administration. Of course, that changed substantially.

The temporary levy, as was introduced in Budget 2016-2017, it is just that, a temporary levy. And 38 per cent of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, even under the current concept, would not pay any of that levy. To help those seniors and those low-income people in our province we've introduced an Income Supplement in excess of \$76 million to help those people in Newfoundland and Labrador, our most vulnerable.

So, Mr. Speaker, these were very difficult and tough choices. It is a temporary levy, I say, 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 remind the Premier that it's their budget that the levy was created under, not our budget. It was their levy that they created, Mr. Speaker. It's a levy that's smothering the economy. It's driving people into hardship in our province. It's decisions and choices made by that government that are impacting people today.

Mr. Speaker, speaking of that government, they have a \$30 million slush fund poked away in the Department of Finance. That's what this government has done.

I ask the Premier: Will you lead and will you govern, and will you use some of this \$30 million fund to eliminate the Liberal levy which is driving so many people of our province into hardship?

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well speaking of the plan, as you transition from one government to the next government, as we did in December of this year, you expect that transition would be built on factual information that would have been supplied to us. In actual fact, Mr. Speaker, that was far from the case. I would say the former administration indeed did not supply the information that was required. As a matter of fact, on September 28 they refused to even answer a question about the financial affairs of our province.

Mr. Speaker, as you transition – we were dealt with many challenges, challenges that we have had to address. We put in place a budget.

When the former premier talks about a slush fund, it is not a slush fund at all. It is planning for challenges that we could face this year. It puts us in a position that we are able to actually leverage more funding, creating jobs for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

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

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

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

So the Premier is not going to answer the question, but he wants to go back in history. I tell you, Mr. Speaker, we laid out the circumstances of the province last year and we clearly said here are the big factors and here is what the implications are going to be on the province. If he couldn't follow it, he's either incompetent or he's playing politics with it, Mr. Speaker. It's as clear as that.

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Mr. Speaker, people throughout the province are outraged by the choices that this Liberal government has made. The budget is an attack on people and it will cause people hardship. It's as simple as that.

I ask the Premier: Will you once and for all listen to what people are saying? You promised you would, and these are the people who elected you. Will you remove this Liberal levy from your budget?

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, one thing that we've been very proud of in our past is our history. I'm surprised today that the former premier, the current Leader of the Opposition wants to distance himself from his own part in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador. He does not want to talk about it because, do you know what? Like most people in our province, they are ashamed of it just like we are. They have left us to having to put this province back on track and we have had to make some tough decisions. These decisions are reflected in Budget 2016-2017.

I will tell you one thing that we will not do, is we will not give up on the young people we see in this House of Assembly today because we



believe they are the future of Newfoundland and Labrador and we are going to do whatever we can to secure their future with the support of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

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

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I can tell you, I'll stand on my record any day.

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** I'll stand on my record that I worked hard for any day, Mr. Speaker. In six months, they've created quite a record for themselves as well, and the people of the province are very much tuned in to the record that they are creating for themselves.

Mr. Speaker, people who earn between \$25,000 and \$36,000, their net income, will pay \$300 for what the Liberals call a temporary level – new words on it in recent days. In fact, anyone earning over \$20,000 will have to pay something towards the levy.

This is public money that will pay for the Liberals million-dollar tunnel study. The public money will pay hundreds of thousands, if not millions, for the Liberals external legal and communications counsel as well, Mr. Speaker.

So I ask the Premier: What's your justification for taxing people to pay for such unnecessary expenditures, expenditures that are not required at this very time?

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The former premier mentioned history again and he was saying that he was proud to stand on his record. So what he's telling us is that he is proud to tell Newfoundland and Labrador that in the next five years, they will be doubling the debt under his plan, under his record. That is not a

record, not a legacy that I don't think any former premier should be proud of it, Mr. Speaker. Asking the next generation of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to pay for the things that they could not properly manage, that's the record that he wants to stand on.

Mr. Speaker, first of all, I think the former premier needs to understand that it's taxable income; it's just not income for people in our province. The concept that he is talking about is around taxable income. So if he wants to talk about facts, he should make sure that he gets his facts correct.

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

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

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

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

I appreciate the chance to get up again and try and get another answer, because we haven't been able to get an answer from the Premier. He likes to talk his spin. He thinks he's still in an election campaign is what's going on over there.

Premier 18,000 people have signed a petition about your levy. You should probably give that some consideration is what you should do. You should think about the students, the seniors, low- and middle-income families, the young, the old, the healthy and the sick, public servants, nurses, teachers who are all impacted by the decisions that you made in your budget.

So I ask you Premier: You are the leader of your caucus. You are the leader of the government. Will you show leadership, reconvene your Cabinet, and reconsider these regressive tax increases that you've decided on?

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've already reconsidered it. That's the reason why – in terms of the levy – it's called a temporary levy. But based on the record that he

would have had – as a matter of fact, if you look back at some leaders that we've seen, the other Leader of the NDP right now was in the media, just recently, talking about debt servicing in our province as it would actually shackle the economy in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The former premier of our province wants to ignore the fact that right now in our province we pay more for debt servicing than we do for education. He wants to ignore the fact under his plan that would have been nearly \$2 billion – \$2 billion – and after 66 years, it would have doubled in just five short years.

Why are you trying to distance yourself from your own decisions that you made and put this province in the situation that it's in today?

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

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

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

Well, he's the Premier. This man across the aisle is the Premier. He's the leader of the province. It's his decisions and his choices that are impacting the people today, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Last year, we laid the facts out very clearly. What did they do? They criticized us. That's what they did. They said it was wrong. Every day they came to the House and they asked for more and more and more.

Premier, what is your plan? When are you finally going to reveal to the people of the province what your plan really is? With a \$30 million slush fund, will you revisit education cuts? Will you put students first, instead of last?

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What the former premier is failing to recognize is you just don't turn the page and you have a blank and a clean sheet. What you have to deal

with, with the transition from one government to the next, is what you had left in the bank account. His legacy was one where the bank accounts were nearly empty, I would say, Mr. Speaker.

Short-term borrowing, long-term borrowing is difficult in our province right now. He seems to be very proud of the fact that just a year ago he was predicting and forecasting a \$900 million deficit for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that turned out to be \$2.7 billion.

So when you talk about being open and transparent, when you talk about leaving a legacy, please stand on your own legacy and admit that the former premier is responsible for the mess we're in today.

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

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

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

The Premier just confirmed he doesn't know the facts because he's way off on the numbers he's throwing out. Throwing out willy-nilly anyway he wants, just throwing it out there. The facts are wrong. The information he has provided is not accurate.

Mr. Speaker, the cries from the people of our province is loud and clear. Although the Liberals campaigned on listening to the people, the people's voices are being ignored. The Minister of Finance has said: We will not make decisions based on who cries the loudest. So I guess people don't really matter. I guess they're not really listening to people. At least they won't act on what they're hearing from us.

I ask the Premier: Will you use some of the slush fund you stashed away to reverse the decision on long-term care beds?

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

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

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Mr. Speaker, I take great exception to the comments in this preamble from

the Member opposite. Our government cares very deeply about the people of the province and, quite frankly, faced with a difficult reality of years of overspending and over-forecasting potential oil royalties and ignoring the facts, the former administration left the province in a fiscal situation that would have led to a crisis had we not done something.

Mr. Speaker, the Member opposite continues to avoid the accountability that the former administration has. The \$30 million contingency fund that is in the budget is, and has been clearly explained to Members opposite, for contingency. I'd ask the Members opposite to understand what the contingency fund is, Sir.

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

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Mr. Speaker, again it's about the choices this government is making. That's what this is about, is about the choices they're making and the impacts it's having on the people of our province.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier has stated that seniors will be better off with the Liberal budget. He also stated that their budget contains good supports for low-income earners. Well, Mr. Speaker, where is the evidence to suggest that? We know the Newfoundland and Labrador 50+ Federation is on the record as saying their members will not be better off.

I ask the Premier: Will you table your evidence to show us how seniors in this province will be better off, and will you show that really are you out of touch or are you not?

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Speaking of out of touch, it's the former premier, I would say, and suggest that he should go back and touch some of the decisions and learn more about the impacts and the negative impacts that it is having on our seniors of today.

Mr. Speaker, in this budget, in Budget 2016-2017 we have made – I know the federation of 50+ members in our province right now, many of them are retired public service workers. In this budget right now, there is a commitment of over \$450 million to secure the future of the pensions of those workers, I would say Mr. Speaker. This is just one example. The Seniors Resource Centre will see some benefits from this budget as well.

The low-income support program in our province, \$76.4 million will help low-income and seniors in our province, and there are many other things in our budget.

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

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

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

So it sounds like the Premier is saying the Newfoundland and Labrador 50+ Federation are wrong in their analysis and their statements.

Mr. Speaker, I'll ask the Premier this. The people of Newfoundland and Labrador are very interested in the process that's taking place surrounding the budget and they are asking when the budget vote is going to take place.

I ask the Premier: Will you provide, say, more than 24 hours' notice to the public to let them know when the budget vote will take place?

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, of course, we are going to be supplying more than 24 hours' notice for the budget vote. There are a number of processes that you know will have to take place.

I'm just surprised today that the former premier is really just not willing to accept responsibility for his administration's actions. He has Members that are sitting there with him today in his Opposition caucus and they are just pretending the last 12 years just didn't happen

and they had nothing to do with the current situation that we're in today.

Just a year ago, they were actually bringing in their own budget and we were having a similar discussion here, when their forecasts were all wrong, I say, Mr. Speaker. They couldn't get one year right, let alone get seven years right.

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

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

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

Mr. Speaker, the Liberal's budget will take thousands of dollars out of the pockets of every Newfoundlander and Labradorian. Watch out for July 1, when the cost of gas increases, insurance goes up, HST increases, personal income tax goes up, and as a result, the cost of food increases.

I ask the minister: How much are you planning to take out of people's pockets, and is there any limit?

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

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

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Mr. Speaker, what our government is not prepared to do is to see the choices about the future of services in Newfoundland and Labrador be given over to other entities besides this government. Quite frankly, the financial situation that we found the province in, based on the actions of the former administration, put our province at a very significant risk of being in a situation where we couldn't borrow the amount of money that would be required to sustain the services that were in place.

We have an obligation, and people have, rightly so, an expectation that we provide critical services. We must take the action to secure our ability to borrow so we can provide those services, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

Mr. Speaker, there is nobody suggesting that actions weren't required to be taken, but the issue here is the choices that were made. That's what the hon. Members on the other side don't seem to understand, that the choices they made were the wrong choices. The Liberal budget will hit, truly, all people in the wallets on July 1.

I ask the minister: What are you doing to help people deal with the harsh budget you delivered? What is the message to people that won't be able to pay their bills on July 1 based on the cumulative effect of your taxes, fees and the Liberal levy?

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

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

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Mr. Speaker, the Members opposite continue to like to pontificate about their message of fear about the impact of these tax increases. Our personal income tax combined with the deficit levy brings us back to 2006 levels.

A tax on insurance is something that the former administration took out in 2008. I would remind the Members of this House, they took it out after they hit peak oil; after they hit peak oil production and peak oil price. They dropped personal income taxes after they hit peak oil and peak production.

Mr. Speaker, we are still competitive within Atlantic Canada. The people of the province understand that for us to maintain control and the ability to provide critical services, we must be able to borrow and that difficult decisions must be made.

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

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I'll say to the hon. minister, the people I'm talking to, their fear is real. That's the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

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

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** So to suggest otherwise is certainly unfortunate coming from the Minister of Finance for Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, on July 1 the province's gas tax is set to double from 16.5 cents to 33 cents per litre. Tomorrow gas goes up another 4 cents a litre. In July, on average people will pay a minimum additional \$10 to \$15 every time they fill up their cars.

I ask the Minister of Finance: Considering gas prices are rising, was there any consideration given to declaring a cap on the provincial taxes on gas?

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

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

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Mr. Speaker, we understand that people in the province have grave concern about the fiscal situation and the actions of this budget. Quite frankly, the choices were difficult. We made it clear as part of the budget announcement this year that the increase on gasoline tax was something that we would be doing on a temporary basis. We also indicated that we expect to make a further announcement around that by this coming fall.

I look forward to providing even more clarity on that as we work through what has been a very difficult situation. But there's no doubt that there are people in the province who certainly also fear the fact that we are faced with a fiscal situation that left unchecked, could be catastrophic, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** Mr. Speaker, clarity would be good because we've seen very little in the past six months.

Mr. Speaker, what is the maximum price, I say to the minister, you'll allow Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to pay on gas through your proposed gas tax policy, or is it unlimited?

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

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Mr. Speaker, the increase in gas tax is clearly outlined in the budget. We've been very transparent about what that increase is and we've also been very transparent, as I was in the answer a couple of minutes ago, that we intend to come back into the House and make the announcement about what the tax will be in the fall.

For the Member opposite to insinuate there is a higher gas tax coming, quite frankly, I think feeds into the narrative that they continue to want to fear monger with the people of the province, which I think is unacceptable, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

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

**MS. PERRY:** Mr. Speaker, the Liberal budget saw seniors take hit after hit.

With another \$100,000 cut now coming from the Age-Friendly Transportation program, can the minister responsible for seniors tell this House what seniors' groups will no longer have access to this once successful program?

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of for Seniors, Wellness and Social Development.

**MS. GAMBIN-WALSH:** Mr. Speaker, what I can tell the House is that particular pilot is being evaluated and it will continue based on those results.

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

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

**MS. PERRY:** Mr. Speaker, inclusion is something that the minister, prior to joining the Liberal team, had always been an advocate for.

I ask her: How can she justify cutting funds for inclusion grants by almost \$150,000?

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

**MR. KIRBY:** Mr. Speaker, we value inclusion in this province, whether it's in schools or in communities. Some of the language that has been used by Members opposite, I won't go back over here today but it's sort of enraging to hear people differentiate between good students and students with special needs, because that's the language was used by the Education critic here in the Chamber.

Luckily enough this year, despite the fiscal nightmare we have on our hands, we did find 27 new positions for teachers who work with children with special education needs. There are 115 additional hours per day for student assistants who work with children with special needs in schools.

We value inclusion. There is no doubt about that.

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

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

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

**MS. PERRY:** Mr. Speaker, I'd like to hear from the minister responsible and the advocate for persons with disabilities and seniors.

Can you tell us specifically, Minister, as a result of your slashing \$150,000 from inclusion grants, what programs and services will no longer be available?

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Seniors, Wellness and Social Development.

**MS. GAMBIN-WALSH:** Mr. Speaker, we are committed to furthering the status of persons

with disabilities. We are committed to inclusive education. We are committed to inclusive societies. We will work with the funds that we are left with to ensure our societies are inclusive.

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

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

**MS. PERRY:** So she's not going to tell us, Mr. Speaker.

In a recent press release, the President of the Newfoundland and Labrador 50 + Federation says the budget will be devastating for seniors and it will reduce their standard of living.

I ask the minister responsible for seniors: Is your government saying that the president of one of the largest seniors' clubs in the province is wrong?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Seniors, Wellness and Social Development.

**MS. GAMBIN-WALSH:** Mr. Speaker, *Budget 2016* saw enhancements to the Low Income Supplement for seniors. By 2025, 25 per cent of the population will be older adults. We are aware of this as a government and we are preparing for an aging population.

There are many things that we are doing. We are putting in place an office of the seniors' advocate, Mr. Speaker. We are putting in place a director for adult protection. We have allocated \$300,000 to the Seniors Resource Centre.

Mr. Speaker, we value seniors and we are continuing to support them in society.

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

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

**MS. PERRY:** Mr. Speaker, the provincial group with over 8,000 members is very concerned that the Liberal budget will push thousands of seniors into poverty. Many of them can barely make ends meet today and, as an MHA, I know that first-hand, and all of you should as well.

The Premier is on record stating that seniors will be better off from our budget.

I ask the minister: What is your position? Does your budget help seniors or does it devastate them?

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister Responsible for Seniors, Wellness and Social Development.

**MS. GAMBIN-WALSH:** Mr. Speaker, this is the same Member, the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune, that said the seniors' advocate was a luxury. On the same day, the Member for Cape St. Francis said it was a good idea. On March 10, the Member for Mount Pearl North said that not only is the seniors' advocate a great idea, but we also need an advocate for veterans.

Mr. Speaker, this government supports seniors.

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

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

**MS. PERRY:** Mr. Speaker, either she doesn't know or she won't tell us, but I can tell you first-hand, seniors would rather have heat in their homes and they'd rather have food in their mouths.

What are you going to do to help seniors of Newfoundland and Labrador, given the devastating cuts you've made to all areas of seniors' living?

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

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

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

I would remind the Member opposite that as part of the budget, there was a fairly significant announcement around the Newfoundland Income Supplement, as well as the enhancement to the Seniors' Benefit, an increase of some \$250 for all the seniors that are eligible for that benefit. We also, with the Newfoundland

Income Supplement, have provided additional money to the tune – over \$60 million in that particular program to help offset some of the increases for low-income individuals, particularly seniors. Particularly those single widows who we know have the highest level of poverty in our province, after years of the former administration not putting effective poverty reduction plans in place.

**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.

Members on the government side of the House have been expressing concerns about *Budget 2016* both inside and out. One of the most unfair initiatives affecting people in every district is the debt reduction levy.

I ask the Premier: If he will allow a free vote of his Members in the House today to end this unfair surtax?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Not only are Members on this side of the House and, of course, the Opposition, but people across Newfoundland and Labrador in every single community, in every single age group, are concerned about the situation that this province finds itself in and the tough decisions that we've had to put in place in Budget 2016-2017.

I remind the Leader of the Third Party that the levy that she is referring to is indeed a temporary levy. There are timelines there, but we put in place offset mitigation programs that will help low-income people in our province, including our seniors, including the most vulnerable.

So part of the Budget 2016-2017, Members on the government side will actually have their opportunity and so will Members of the Opposition have the opportunity to vote on Budget 2016-2017.

**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: Since the vote on a private Member's motion does not constitute a confidence vote and they won't be in fear over there, and in light of the general public outcry about the unfair levy – and forget the temporary part – why would he not allow his Members to show their support for their constituents in a free vote here today?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, there are some things that the Member opposite might want to forget, but some things that I certainly do not want to forget, because it's important for people in Newfoundland and Labrador – she may not want to be the conduit of this kind of language, she may not want to talk about the low-income support program, she may not want to talk about a temporary levy, because they doesn't suit where she is in her politics. It's got nothing to do with being fair and being transparent and factually representing the facts of this budget. It's all about political gain, I would say, Mr. Speaker.

It is a temporary levy; that's been said. It's been clearly articulated the plans that we would have for this very difficult decision at a very difficult time that we have in our province.

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

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

**MS. ROGERS:** Mr. Speaker, with all the job losses, regressive tax measures and social spending cuts, I ask the Premier: What are his concrete plans to keep young families in the province?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, one of the most important things that you could do for any young family or any young

Newfoundlander and Labradorian is not burden them with debt. The Members opposite would prefer now that we take out the credit card for our youth. We would change the name of the people that are enjoying the benefits today, and put the next generation – put their name on that credit card.

That is exactly what the Member opposite is suggesting that we should do. It is not something we are prepared to do. We have a mandate now to get this province back on track. It is a desperate fiscal situation that we are facing right now. Some difficult choices, Mr. Speaker, have to be made, and we were going to do the best job that we can do to get the finances in order, because we are not interested in passing this on to the next generation.

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

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

**MS. ROGERS:** Mr. Speaker, can the Premier tell us details of the diversification strategy he promised during the election? People want to get back to work.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I said too during the election, one of the most important things that you can do for any Newfoundlander and Labradorian is to make sure that you do your best that you can do, create an environment where they can be successful. We put in place an infrastructure program of over \$570 million, I would say, Mr. Speaker. That's important for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. It can help them find a job.

It's important for our communities so that we can put in place good, safe, sound infrastructure that they can actually make a decision to live right here Newfoundland and Labrador. We are working now to make sure that we extract the wealth and the benefits from all our industries, not just the oil industry, as we seen from the previous administration.

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



**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre, for a very quick question.

**MS. ROGERS:** Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier: With all the job losses and regressive tax measures and social spending cuts, again what is his vision for the province for the next three years?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I should ask the Member opposite if she should speak to her leader because he was on record just in recent days as saying that debt will actually shackle and will actually slow the economy down in Newfoundland and Labrador. These are his words. These are the comments that he has been making. Making sure that we do not let debt servicing and interest rates put a stranglehold on the future of Newfoundland and Labrador.

These are very tough decisions that we have had to make, but we need to correct the path that we were on. This budget in 2016-2017 will help us with that. I can assure you right now there is no one in Newfoundland and Labrador any more than me that wants to make sure that can get Newfoundlanders and Labradorians working, get our fiscal house in order first, and with the necessary investments that we are currently making in infrastructure, this indeed will mean that the future of Newfoundland and Labrador will be bright.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

### Tabling of Documents

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

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

In Question Period a couple of days ago, one of the Members from the Third Party asked for some information that I promised to table in this

House, and I have the document here. I just wanted to provide that to them.

Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

### Notices of Motion

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

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

Pursuant to Standing Order 11, I give notice that this House do not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, May 19; and pursuant to Standing Order 11, I give notice that this House do not adjourn at 10 p.m. on Thursday, May 19.

Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

### Petitions

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** 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 emergency responders are at greater risk of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to enact legislation containing a presumptive clause with respect to PTSD for people employed in various front-line emergency response professions including firefighters, emergency medical

services professionals and police officers not already covered under federal legislation.

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

Mr. Speaker, it's not my first time getting up in the House on this particular petition that has been presented and provided to me. It's not, but I think it's very fitting this week being Police Week. Just today, as we heard about earlier in today's business, there was a service today to remember and to honour those police and peace officers who have given their lives in the course of their duty.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you over the last six months to a year, I've learned more about PTSD than I ever did during 25 years in my policing career. I've also learned and become better understanding of how significant the impact can be.

I know there are many, many front-line responders, police officers, emergency medical technicians and firefighters who suffer from PTSD today, and quite often do it quietly. They do it quietly because of the stigma quite often associated with mental health, but they also do it quietly because they are afraid they are going to lose their ability for income.

Under today's regulations, under workers' compensation, a first responder or any person who's diagnosed with PTSD has to provide a particular event that caused the PTSD. The most recent studies show, that's not usually where PTSD comes from. It usually comes from many, many years of being exposed to chaotic, traumatic and difficult circumstances that over several years, many years, it could be a shorter period of time or a longer period of time, PTSD develops. Under current rules, those people are not eligible for workers' compensation under rules that exist today.

What this petition is about is creating a presumptive clause. If a first responder gets diagnosed with PTSD, it would be presumed to have been a workplace injury and they won't have to go through the difficulty of trying to establish it was a workplace injury when they are not able to do so; when they're in the most critical and difficult and challenging times in

their lives, when the last thing they want to talk about is the trauma they've been exposed to during their entire career.

Mr. Speaker, this is a petition we'll see today. I think it's fitting during Police Week while we acknowledge the hard work of police officers and first responders. This is going to be very important. The understanding is growing and the effort and the desire for better legislation is going to continue.

Thank you.

### Orders of the Day

#### Private Members' Day

**MR. SPEAKER:** It being Private Members' Day, I call on the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi to present her resolution.

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

I move, seconded by the Member for St. John's Centre:

BE IT RESOLVED that the House of Assembly urges the government to ensure that the Deficit Reduction Levy is immediately eliminated and that any replacement measure be based on progressive taxation principles and further urges that an independent review of the Newfoundland and Labrador provincial income tax system begin promptly to make it fairer to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Mr. Speaker, it's now more than a month since the Liberal budget was dropped like a ton of bricks on an unsuspecting public and the public backlash is continuing.

The most reviled feature of the budget is what government has been calling the temporary Deficit Reduction Levy. They're missing the point, Mr. Speaker, whether temporary or permanent is not the issue, it is the levy itself that is the problem and I'd like to point that out to the Members of the House. The levy, when people are writing to us about it, they are not talking about temporary or permanent. They are talking about the levy.

This is an email I received on April 18: The levy tax is an excessive and ethically questionable tax that is unequally applied to different income earners. For certain groups it is almost 1 per cent of their gross salary; while for others, especially those who earn six-figure salaries and higher, it hardly accounts for 0.1 per cent of their salaries or less. The budget is one of austerity measures that will hurt those with low- and middle-incomes the most.

That's what is worrying people about the levy, Mr. Speaker. The levy hits low- and middle-income earners much harder relative to their income than it hits higher income earners.

The Liberal platform stated, they "... will continue to listen to the more than 500,000 advisors we have across our province, because we know building a stronger tomorrow for Newfoundland and Labrador starts with working together with you."

I ask the Premier, where did he hear the word levy when he met with his 500,000 advisors? Yes, they had consultations in the province but there was no report of anybody asking for a Debt Reduction Levy in any of the reports of any of their consultations. I'd like to know, who were those 500,000 advisors they are talking about?

The Liberals have not been listening to the people of the province. We hope they're going to listen today. In fact, a former Liberal premier has said, if they really need the money people will want them to do it in the fairest possible way. They see the levy as the worst possible way, and they do, Mr. Speaker, like what I just read a minute ago.

I'm going to read from another email I received. This one is from a couple. We are 32-years old – so each of the couple is 32 – living in St. John's East – it's actually in the District of St. John's East – Quidi Vidi – and are both extremely hardworking. However, we are middle class and this budget is too much for us to take on. We understand how difficult it is for anybody making up the sunshine list to understand or identify with the reality of those who make up the middle class.

We can't afford this levy and all the increases in the budget. The Newfoundland economy will

suffer, our young professionals will leave – they are two of those young professionals – families will lose their homes and some will have to resort to bankruptcy. What might have looked good on a black, white and red spreadsheet to the current government is at an unfathomable cost to the hardworking people of the province.

The debt reduction levy is an unfair levy. We're not the only ones saying it. The people of the province are saying it. It's an unfair levy that the Finance Minister said was based on the Ontario Health Insurance Plan, but that was a health care levy, not one to raise money for general revenues and it didn't operate the same anyway.

Thousands of people have signed their names to an NDP petition protesting the levy because they recognize, as do the NDP, that we are in a race to the bottom on the fairness scale. We have signatures from residents in every corner of the province. We've been presenting them day in and day out here in the House. I think my colleague, the Member for St. John's Centre, has another load to present here during this debate.

We've been looking forward to the opportunity to debate the levy – and I know we'll have a piece of legislation when we'll be able to do it as well – but we wanted to bring it to the House today in a private Member's motion to give some freedom to everybody in the House to speak to this levy and to give freedom to the backbenchers of the government to vote against this levy, because we know their constituents are writing them about it because I'm receiving some of the emails that are going to them as well. So they're receiving them, whether or not they're reading them I don't know; and whether or not they're understanding that people out there are intelligent, know how to do analysis and are telling them that it is wrong.

The motion calls for the immediate elimination of the Deficit Reduction Levy and for any replacement measure to be based on progressive taxation principles. We may have to have some workshops around progressive taxation principles to explain what that really means because something that puts a bigger burden on the backs of lower income than on the backs of the higher income is not progressive.

The Premier has tried to justify the levy by suggesting that higher income earners already pay more than their fair share of taxes. But it is actually people of modest means who shoulder a larger share of the tax burden in Newfoundland and Labrador than is the case in other provinces.

Take the case, for example, of a person earning \$50,000 compared with someone earning \$200,000. I'm looking at Newfoundland and Labrador and New Brunswick. When you add in the levy, the person earning \$200,000 in our province pays virtually the identical amount as the counterpart in New Brunswick, only about \$7 in the difference.

But the individual with \$50,000 in taxable income in our province pays \$4,764 in personal income tax, plus \$600 on the levy, for a total of \$5,364. Their counterpart in New Brunswick pays \$4,070; that's \$1,300 in the difference, Mr. Speaker, between the \$50,000 earner here and the \$50,000 earner in New Brunswick.

To be clear, just in case they didn't get it, someone earning \$200,000 pays a virtually identical amount in this province as their counterpart in New Brunswick, but someone trying to make a go of it on \$50,000 pays \$1,300 more than their equivalent in New Brunswick. That is not fair taxation.

Comparisons at most income levels with earners from most other provinces yield the same results. I would suggest to other Members of the House, especially the Members of the government side, because I don't think they've done their homework themselves, that if they take the figures that exist, all those tables are out there, and do the homework themselves they will see the truth of what I have just said.

We are calling for, in this motion, an external review of the income tax regime. By not implementing an independent external review of the income tax regime in the province before putting an unfair levy on the people of the province, and by making small increases in the top brackets of personal income taxes, in fact, the Liberal government is basically agreeing with the actions of the PC government under Danny Williams by favouring the wealthy in the province, because that's what his budgets did. Our lower income earners pay a higher

percentage of their income tax than higher income earners, and that's a fact. And they can say what they want; they can't disprove that fact.

We know Newfoundland and Labrador has one of the most rural populations in the country – the lowest percentage of its population living in urban areas. We have a difficult geography, the highest aging demographic in the nation, and higher cost of living increases than most places in the country. Lower taxes on these who can pay more means that we will get less service because it costs more per dollar to deliver them. If we reduce per capita spending to the Canadian average, we would provide substandard services.

Economists now advise that government spending cuts during a recession will only drag down the economy and further reduce revenue. So-called austerity cuts will deepen the recession; they will cause a dangerous double-dip after the first recession. Economists recommend investing in social and economic infrastructure projects to weather a recession.

Political economist Diana Gibson said last week during a public presentation, "The wealthy are paying much, much less a portion of their income than lower income individuals. So what we saw in this budget is the continuation of a program the government had since before 2007 of letting the wealthy kind off the hook and having lower and middle income people step up."

Some of the most controversial measures seem to take dead aim at rural people. One such Liberal choice that has received less public attention than it deserves is the doubling of the provincial gas tax; that's about \$10 extra on a fill-up of a small car, \$20 or more for a pickup.

People in smaller communities already had to drive further to get to work and to get access to doctors, hospitals, grocery stores and other necessary services. The budget closes many public buildings in smaller communities, forcing people to drive further for services, at the same time the price of gas is going up substantially. An increase in the cost of food and other goods will surely follow right on the heels of the increased gas tax and the insurance fees.

What was seen yesterday in Bonavista when a woman put her vehicle in front of the AES offices will continue. People are absolutely feeling frustrated and desperate. She said she didn't plan it; she just did it because she's so frustrated. Is this what the Premier and the Minister of Education and the Minister of AES called progress, closing AES offices and closing down libraries?

Published in *The Walrus* yesterday, award-winning writer Lisa Moore said, with regard to the backward way they're moving: The tax on books and the closure of libraries is an attack on writers, bookstore owners, publishers and students. That a big statement from Lisa Moore.

Other budget measures also undermine the quality of life in rural areas. Ferry fees have been increased. Rural government offices are closed. Valuable health services in communities like Bonavista and Harbour Breton are eliminated. No doubt, the Liberal government is facing a challenging situation because of the reckless financial management of the previous administration, but the government's standard defence has been they had no choice – pity them.

A budget is all about choices. The Liberal government made some really bad choices. There's no vision. There's no plan. Mr. Speaker, we ask this government to eliminate the regressive Deficit Reduction Levy. Listen to the people and immediately put in place an external independent income tax review that would show the people of the province that they do care about them and that they believe in fairness and that they are listening.

I look forward now to hearing from other Members. I know they, too, will be reflecting what we are hearing from the people in the province. People in the province all over are watching this session today. I know across the room they have had the same emails I've had. I know the people who've been telling me they have been waiting to see what is going to happen, have been saying it to them as well.

They keep saying they're listening. They keep saying they're hearing, but they're showing they're not. One of the simplest things they've done that could be undone – besides opening up

the libraries again – one of the simplest things they could do would be to stop the levy. They can use the taxation system in a fair way to get the money they need, but get rid of this levy.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

(Disturbance in the gallery.)

**MR. SPEAKER:** I remind visitors to the gallery that you're welcome here – this is the people's House and we're absolutely delighted to see you here – but we ask that you do not show approval or disapproval for the debate that's taking place on the floor of the House of Assembly.

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

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

I'm pleased to have an opportunity to chat about this motion today. It's incredibly important. I really can't wait, to be honest, for July 2 this year because I think a lot of the claims about levels of taxation will be laid bare and the truth about these matters will finally be known to people in the province when they look at their paystub and they realize that the extent of what has happened is not as austere as some would have us believe.

I wanted to just respond quickly to couple of things that the Member opposite had to say. I really feel like the Third Party and their representatives have been all over the place in terms of what their expectations are. Mr. McCurdy, who leads the NDP, was recently in the media saying that basically if it was his choice, he would have raised taxes in the same way that the government has, but he'd somehow do it differently. There are no specifics, and I don't hear a lot of specifics.

I wonder what the alternatives are. Does the Opposition want to see further borrowing? If they want to see further borrowing, then how much more borrowing? Do they want to see further cuts to education? Do they want reductions to classroom spending? Do they want

reductions to health care spending? Do they want cuts to income support?

We don't have a whole lot of options. With a lot of the spending reductions in this year's budget, we don't have a lot of places to go. I certainly can't find a whole lot of other places to go in the department that I work in.

With respect to progressivity of taxes, the Member talked about people who make \$50,000 a year and people who make \$200,000 a year. Well, somebody who makes \$50,000 a year, with this budget, will pay \$4,764 in taxes, and that's lower than what that person would have paid at that income level in 2006. It's lower. A person making \$200,000 a year would pay \$29,688.

So the person that she's talking about that is making \$50,000 is paying \$4,764 and the person making \$200,000 is \$29,688. So if that's not progressive income tax, then I'd like to see the definition because that is pretty progressive; that is quite a steep climb.

The other thing that the Member said, which I don't agree with because I don't believe it's factual, is regarding a higher income earner, she says, getting off the hook. That's not the case here. The taxes all together that have been introduced in the budget this year, those taxes for highest income earners in the province are the highest increases on those income brackets since 2003 – the largest increases that we've seen on the highest income earners since 2003, so that's true.

There was an interesting and very instructive article on CBC's website recently, commentary by probably one of our best journalists in the province David Cochrane. He talked about basically the structure of our economy in looking at the tax filers in the province and basically what we looked like. He said you know: "There are just over 50,000 people in this province who earn more than \$80,000. That is about 12 per cent of all the income filers." Those 50,000 people – and remember we're a population of over half a million – pay 54 per cent of all the income tax in the province. That's about \$829 million a year paid by just over half of the population.

Twenty percent of taxpayers pay more than half of all the provincial income tax and 88 per cent of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, about 374,000 people, pay the other 46 per cent. So you can see he's illustrating that higher income earners are paying their rightly larger share of taxes.

He says: "Only 30,000 people make more than \$100,000 in this province. Only 11,000 people make more than \$150,000. Only 4,000 people make more than \$250,000." That's important because there are not a whole bunch of rich Newfoundlanders and Labradorians out there who we can magically tax and make these austere problems disappear. There are only 4,000 people in Newfoundland and Labrador who make more than \$250,000 a year. So that's a fact.

The other thing he says – and this is important – whether you want to tax the rich or the 1 per cent or whatever, consider this, please. The people who make over \$250,000 a year, if you look at the sunshine list that was generated by James McLeod at *The Telegram*, the people who make that are surgeons, they're oncologists, they are people who are the highest income level in our health care system and they are people we rely on to care for us when we're sick.

You know I've had more than one conversation since the budget with people who are in that area of work who say, if taxes increase any higher on them, they might move to another province that is more competitive than us. Now, that's the truth. So it's a delicate balance; taxation is a delicate balance and I don't claim to be an expert in it, but I would like to know what the alternatives are because I'm not hearing any.

Further to that, we have 424,000 or so tax filers in the province. We need to be competitive. We need to have a tax structure that keeps us competitive across Atlantic Canada. The temporary Deficit Reduction Levy is just that, it's temporary. It's not something that's permanent. We've said that and the government is committed to removing it as soon as is possible, but you have to understand right now, it pains me to say this, I think it is sorrowful that in Newfoundland and Labrador today in this budget because of the mess we were left with, we spend more on debt servicing – basically you

could take that money and throw it in a burn barrel. It has the same impact on the lives of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians; you could just burn it. Because we're paying more in debt servicing than we are on all of the education in the province, and that includes kindergarten to grade twelve, early childhood education, all the programs we have to support early childhood education in K to 12. We're spending more on debt servicing than we are on that, and that is a crying shame.

The other thing that has to be made clear, while the Leader of the Official Opposition stood up today and he lambasted us that we're all to blame, when they had an opportunity to reduce taxes in Newfoundland and Labrador, when oil was trading at its highest and production was at its peak, they gave the largest income tax breaks to the highest income earners in the province, and those in the lowest income bracket got zip. They didn't get anything. They were forgotten about. Now that's their utmost concern.

I heard the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune; she's all concerned about seniors now. They weren't concerned when they were cutting taxes on the highest income earners. They didn't think about those elderly, widowed women in our society; elderly women living in very difficult circumstances. They did not think about that. That was not considered. That's not who shared in our common wealth, and that's a fact.

That lost revenue they removed from the tax structure cost us \$4 billion – \$4 billion handed away mostly to people who could have gotten by without it. So this budget is intended to bring us back to more sustainable levels. It's important to remember that even with these increases, people at all levels will pay less tax than they did in 2006. We're just hitting the reset button. People across all income levels, and that includes HST, that includes provincial income tax, that includes the levy – less tax across all income levels than they did in 2006.

Was it a difficult budget? Would I have liked to have done different things? I've been an education advocate all my life. Would I have liked to have done different things? Would I have liked to have an early intervention program for children with low literacy levels? Would I like to have a directed program for children who

are struggling in math? Would I like to have a project-based program for young people in junior high school to help them work together and learn together? I'd like to do all those things, but the actions of the previous administration in racking up a deficit of somewhere in the order of \$2.7 billion that is looking us in the face now, they removed those options. We simply don't have them.

The other thing is everybody who's a mom or a dad, has grandchildren, you have to remember, we can't trade this off to our kids. Their credit card should not carry the cost of the services that we want. There are services that we absolutely need, and by and large those were preserved in this budget because we are still spending over \$8 billion on programs and services that are essential for people in the province. We still have a lot of difficult decisions to make, but the things that we want and the things that we need are different. We cannot put the things that we want on the credit card of the next generation any longer. It is really that simple.

Now, Mr. Speaker, if I can find my paper here, I'm going to propose an amendment to the motion.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Placentia West – Bellevue, that the resolution be amended by adding immediately before the word "Deficit" the word "Temporary" and by deleting the words "immediately eliminated" and substituting the words "eliminated as soon as possible" and by deleting the words "that any replacement measure be based on progressive taxation principles and further urges" and by deleting the words "begin promptly to make it fairer to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians" and substituting the words "be initiated in 2016-17 to ensure fairness and competitiveness."

The amended resolution would read: "Be It Resolved that the House of Assembly urges the Government to ensure that the Temporary Deficit Reduction Levy is eliminated as soon as possible and that an independent review of the Newfoundland and Labrador provincial income tax system be initiated in 2016-17 to ensure fairness and competitiveness."

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

There's an amendment proposed to the private Member's motion. The Speaker is going to take a few moments to review the amendment and I'll report back to the House on its admissibility.

If we could stop the clock for the Member's time.

### Recess

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

The Speaker has reviewed the amendment and has found it to be in order.

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

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

I just have a few seconds left to speak. I just want to say that, again, we're in a tough position and we've made tough decisions. I've gone back and I've reviewed a lot of stories in the media and both the Leader of the Third Party and the Leader of the Official Opposition have made similar statements about being in a tough spot and having to make tough decisions that are not politically popular. It's really that simple. The right decisions aren't always the easy ones to make. We could have made easy decisions that were no difficulty, that had no public scrutiny, but then again we would have been doing what the previous government was doing for the time they were in power, for most of it at least.

On the bright side, the budget still spends \$8.48 billion, so almost \$8.5 billion, on programs and services we need; \$570 million on infrastructure that's going to create a lot of jobs in Newfoundland and Labrador in many communities. We just passed the Independent Appointments Commission legislation. We're making investments in full-day kindergarten. We're going to have the Premier's Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes before long. The Premier's Forum on municipal issues is going to be a venue for raising municipal matters.

We're investing in tourism marketing. We'll have an Office of the Seniors' Advocate now to advocate for seniors. We're going to have in-home healthy living assessments that we

committed to in the election. We're going to make improvements to the *Public Tender Act* so that we can get a better price for –

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

The hon. Member's time for speaking has expired.

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

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

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to rise today and speak to the private Member's motion from the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi, as well as the amendment that was put forward.

This motion obviously is reflective of where we see us today in regard to the budget that was brought down in April, and one of the components to it was the implementation of a levy. Over the past number of weeks since that time, across the province and here in the Legislature, we have had a lot of discussion about that levy and, more broadly, about the choices that the current government had to make. I think everybody is respectful to the fact that some decisions had to be made, some significant decisions.

Like any government that comes to power and is elected, it is about the choices you make and what you make those choices to be. What are your priorities? How do you balance that out? There are two sides to that ledger; there is certainly the revenue side and the expenditure side. How do you, as I said, balance that out and what approach do you take?

From what I've heard in my own District of Ferryland and throughout the province, in emails and everything we have seen, there is certainly confusion. People feel that this is too harsh. It's gone too far. It's not, as I said, a balanced approach. Reflective of what we need to do and make some decisions, it's for the short term but the decisions we make today and the choices we make today have implications for years to come.



We know we had to be very careful of our economy when we're budgeting and those choices we make. Something like this levy and all the other broader taxes and fees that have been part of this *Budget 2016*, cumulatively, has a negative effect and will have a negative effect, we believe, on the economy as we move forward, which is so important. We've known over the past number of months – maybe the last year or two – we've seen a slowing, certainly, of the economy and some industries.

Others are doing fine, but that's that balance we need to strike and be very careful of what that threshold is and how much we can take out of the economy, and what we leave in, because we know an economy is driven by business – much of it small business – by those employers and businesses that employ individuals, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, to allow them to earn a living, provide for their families, provide the things they need, to allow them to live right here in Newfoundland and Labrador, whether that's in our largest cities, in our towns, or in the smallest communities in rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

So the choices we make and the decisions we make certainly ripple through Newfoundland and Labrador. A decision like this levy and the other actions taken in regard to how we'd raise revenue, through the other means, in terms of taxation, and the other ones that have been suggested, certainly have, as I said, an extreme cumulative effect in our economy in Newfoundland and Labrador, and to every demographic in Newfoundland and Labrador from our very youngest, to our newborn, to our seniors. It's important that when we make choices, we certainly make the right choices.

So this private Member's motion from the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi specifically states to ensure the Deficit Reduction Levy is immediately eliminated and any replacement measure be based on progressive taxation and further urges that a review take place of the provincial income tax system.

Now, we've heard that it's temporary. Well, when it's implemented and comes into effect, the reality is there are dollars coming out of people's pockets. Whether it's temporary or not,

or when we have a sunset date, or whether it's gone, the reality is there's money coming out of people's pockets. And that's everybody from \$20,000 right through, depending on what your earnings are. So that's significant. That's one component of it, so that's the tip of the iceberg.

Then when all those others that we talk about, which is in the budget, fees, other costs that have to come out of people's pockets. At the time when I mentioned it's needed in the economy and needed to allow the economy to continue to move along, for people to have hope, for people to want to stay in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The holistic approach of what the policies are, from a financial perspective, needs to be inviting enough that people want to stay and live in Newfoundland and Labrador, wherever they are, and they can be assured they have a future. They have a future recognizing the situation the province is in, in regard to some of the financial challenges. As last year we had said, there was need for serious decisions to be made. We laid out some options for that, recognizing everybody would have to give a little in regard to that.

Again, I get back to the earlier comments. It's all about choices. Governance is all about those choices and how you make them and that you are in touch with people, and what you're hearing from people. We heard about the consultations that were taken over the past number of months – 500,000 were consulted. Well, I don't know how many came up with a levy and said they wanted a levy. I don't know, I'd like to see that. I know people in my district, people I've talked to around the province, they haven't suggested that. They did not suggest that.

Then it gets to the issue of listening to people. The Premier has indicated if you can't listen, you can't govern. I know full well. I had the privilege of serving in government in previous years in Cabinet, and there are tough decisions to make, but along that way you listen to people, you understand where they are coming from. All demographics, no matter where you live, you have different perspectives, and with that knowledge you bring all that together and you try and come to a consensus of how you're going to move forward.

This levy; how it was implemented, what it represents. I know the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi earlier suggested, I think it was Ontario in regard to what they had done, and referenced the fact that it was directed particularly to a service delivery model. Even this levy today, it is just taking revenues and saying we're going to put it into general revenue. There's nothing specific, as was indicated by the hon. Member that's done in other jurisdictions.

Even with that, as I get back to my point in terms of the implications it has on every Newfoundlander and Labradorian and what that means for them in terms of wanting us to continue to maintain our population in Newfoundland and Labrador, wanting to maintain our economy, wanting to maintain growth and continue to grow as we have over the past 10 years.

We've heard a variety of various views in terms of what we've done over the past 10 years, but we'll take responsibility for what we did over the past 10 years and the decisions we've made, and we'll have to speak to them. The Premier and his Cabinet have to speak to decisions they've made. They will speak to them, or they should speak to them. One of them being this levy and a whole other range of financial directions they've taken, and they should speak to them.

I'll speak to my responsibility of what I did when I was minister and I was part of a government. I have no problem with that. Was everything done to 100 per cent the way it should have been? No, it wasn't. No, but I'll take responsibly. I'll stand and I won't back away from it. I say on the other side, you shouldn't either.

If you make a decision, get up and tell us why you made the decision, why you believe it's the right decision and what the result is going to be at the end of the day, whether it's a month away, whether it's 12 months away, or whether its five years' time or four years' time. That's what you need to do. You just need to speak to it.

The other interesting thing with this motion here today is that it's not a budgetary motion. It's not a non-confidence motion as would be seen with

enabling legislation of the budget, or with the actual budget motion itself. It's a private Member's motion. So it's 40 MHAs sitting here representing 40 districts in this wonderful Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Each person here today can make a conscious decision, can think about the levy, can think about the taxation scheme that's in place for this budget and think about whether this is the best choice. As I said, it was all about choices.

Do you believe this is the best choice? If you don't, you can stand in this hon. House on this private Member's motion. We can look to you, Mr. Speaker, and say yes or no. I do concur with the levy, or look and say I don't concur with the levy. That's what being elected is all about. That's what democracy is all about.

That's why it's a privilege to stand here in this House because there are only 40 of us. People may say, well, it's politics and people get elected, but I firmly believe, and most do, it's a noble profession. You get elected to serve and you come in here. You get elected to represent the people who brought you here, and today every Member is going to have a chance to stand, look to the Chair, and say whether you're going to support this motion or not. I certainly look forward to that.

Mr. Speaker, in regard to the levy, I've talked about choices. We've gone through Estimates and parts of the budget. We've come in here and ministers have shown up with their officials and we've gone through various components and taxation – the levy has been one of those – and have a general discussion about what are the options, what are the choices. You've got a levy; you've got other areas where you can raise taxation.

We've had discussion about a \$30 million contingency fund. There was some discussion, well, maybe we could use that to offset the levy and some of the choices that have been made. There are other areas we've seen cuts in; maybe we could use that, like eliminating the levy so we can make that possible. Whether it's in areas of class cap size in our education system, whether it's with regard to libraries closing, whether it's regard to over-the-counter medications and so forth that's available to people in our society.

All that is part of the overall discussion and decisions we make when we stand today, conscious decisions, on do we believe in the levy, do we not? As I said, each Member will have an opportunity to stand up and speak to that, which is so important.

Now when you talk about public policy and issues that you deal with in your district as an elected official, the true test of that is when you're in your district, you're in a community, you're at a town hall, after church getting a bite to eat somewhere, someone comes up to you. They are not really political. They just respect the fact that you're elected and they want to share their thoughts with you.

I can honestly say, I've been in politics since 2007, I've not seen an issue or an item that people are more engaged in and want to express their concern about or express their ideas than this levy and many of the measures that have been taken in this budget. I've had numerous conversations, numerous emails, phone calls from people who tell me their situation.

A single mom, a young boy that's eight years old, has a job about \$30,000. She does well now, works hard. It's a challenge at times. Some of the things that's involved with this budget, including the levy, she does the calculations up and looks at what's coming out on a monthly basis of her net income to try and live; whether that's her house, whether that's her vehicle that she has to put gas in to go to work every day or to drive her son to softball or to drive her son to hockey in the wintertime, because she wants to make sure he's active and give him that fulsome approach if she can to his lifestyle, which is so important at an early age.

That's the basics of what we do as elected representatives in Newfoundland and Labrador. We talk to the people and we hear from the people we represent. They tell us those real life experiences, just like we have, but they look to us because we are the elected officials. When they see things like this coming out, they have concern. Oftentimes they have fear, and they have a desire to be listened to.

I've certainly tried to do that, listen to many in my district, certainly around the province who have emailed and tried to express concern in

regard to this levy. From my perspective as Finance critic here in this House and as the Member for Ferryland, I've tried to express and acknowledge there were challenges and decisions needed to be made.

Once again, I get back to the point of it's about choices and the choices you make and they're balanced. Today, the choice – but it's how do you roll it out? What's going to happen over the next number of months to get you the results you want? As far as I'm concerned, much of what we've heard over the past number of weeks and months is very vague on that. There doesn't appear to be any plan. There's no vision. We've lost, I think, in the province the whole issue of hope.

We're a proud province. We've done well over the past number of years. We've got great resources. We've got great people. We've got great opportunities. We've got great industry and there's more to come, but we do have some difficult times.

There is hope. But we need to instill in our very youngest and everybody else in our society in Newfoundland and Labrador that this is the place to be, we need you here and there's sound management and there's a vision here in the province of why you need to stay. A levy like this and the budget and some of the components of it, as I said when I started, are not balanced, are not visionary and are set up to hurt the economy and hurt Newfoundland and Labrador.

My time is winding down, Mr. Speaker, but, as I said when I started, this is an opportunity for 40 MHAs here today to stand, and maybe if this gets passed, the motion put forward, at least it will start a discussion about this wasn't done right, maybe we can start over and work collectively together to get where we need to go in this great province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I'm looking forward to seeing everybody stand here later and see how they're going to vote on this motion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**MR. HAGGIE:** A point of order, Mr. Speaker, referring to Standing Order 43(1).

I wonder if you could clarify with a ruling as to whether we are discussing the previous question, the amendment, or whether we're discussing the main motion because the Member opposite has used 15 minutes to discuss the main motion. It wasn't clear that we were discussing the amendment.

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

On Private Members' Day, we don't vote on the amendment until the end of the day. So Members are discussing both the amendment and the motion at the same time.

The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

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

It's great to have an opportunity to stand in the House to discuss this private Member's motion, Mr. Speaker. We understand, all across the province, the emotions that are attached to this budget. Mr. Speaker, there are a few things we must do as a government and I'm proud to be part of to say this: You can't put your head in the sand.

People know me. People know that I have been dealing with the Corner Brook, Bay of Islands area for a number of years. I was one of the most outspoken people of government, but I always gave a solution. I always said here's an option when you give a solution, Mr. Speaker.

I'm standing here in my place and I'm saying: We have to take a stand. We cannot pass this on to our kids and grandkids. I said it before and I'll say it again. I said it to the rally that I attended with the Member for Corner Brook out in Corner Brook: If you expect to do what's popular, this is not the right place to be right now. But if you expect to do what's right, what's needed for the future, we stand in our place here today, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, emotions are running high and I know the Member for St. John's East – Quidi

Vidi, the statement that she made is that the Premier said that the higher wage earners are paying enough taxes already. Adds fuel to the fire, but it's just not true, simply not true. It's great for rhetoric. It's great when you stand up now, you go on and you make these statements, but we had to deal with the facts that were in front of us. We had to deal with the facts.

In the budget itself, there are a lot of issues in the budget, a lot of positive things. The Member for St. John's Centre, in Hansard, said that there's \$20 million slush fund. The slush fund – it is great rhetoric. People around can hear it, great, my God; the Liberals got a \$20 million slush fund. The \$20 million is help to leverage federal finances for a capital work projects in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. It sounds great. People jump on it, but it's not factually true.

Just a prime example, there's already \$24.9 million, I think, or \$24.7 million federal/provincial/municipal money approved. Mr. Speaker, when we leverage federal money, provincial funds and municipal funds, there's over \$354 million available in Newfoundland and Labrador. That's the facts of what is in the budget.

We hear the Third Party speaking about, well, what are you doing for rural Newfoundland and Labrador? What are we going to do to sustain it? What better way to sustain rural Newfoundland and Labrador than to help build infrastructure so they can create industries, so they can create tourism? What better way? These are the facts that are in the budget, Mr. Speaker.

I know the Minister of Transportation and Works, there's \$575 million in infrastructure; that's for our schools and hospitals. That's the road in Labrador, to widen the road in Labrador. So when you stand up and say, well, what are you doing to sustain rural Newfoundland and Labrador; \$63 million spent to widen the road so they could expand the Labrador tourism and industry, that is what is in the budget. That is what is in this budget, Mr. Speaker.

I just heard the Opposition House Leader make statements that it's not popular. Mr. Speaker, if this government didn't make the right decision – we probably could have done things that were

pushed off another four or five years down the road, sure; but is it the right thing to do? It may be the popular thing to do, but is it the right thing to do? That's the question we've got to ask ourselves.

I heard the House Leader – I'm not getting into a debate, because I respect the Member. He was saying, well, he never heard any other issue about this. Well, I won't go back to Bill 29, but I will say that when you've got to make the tough decisions, people in Newfoundland and Labrador are engaged. I expect them to be engaged. I respect their opinions. I respect every commentary that comes our way about it. But what I ask every person in Newfoundland and Labrador, understand the decisions that we were faced when we walked in and took over government. That's what I ask people to understand and look in, dig into when you walk in one day and you've been told that here's the deficit, two days later you say, oh, by the way, it's gone up another \$700 million or \$800 million. That's what we were faced with.

The government itself – and they know; the decisions that you have to make, if you keep pushing them down the road, you're going to make some popular decisions; but once you make the tough decisions, once you make that stand and say, we can't do this anymore, there are going to be decisions that are going to be unpopular, but they have to be right decisions. When the House Leader for the Opposition stands up and says, well, they weren't that popular. We knew they weren't going to be that popular, but we knew they were correct. We knew we had to correct the train – the train was off the tracks. We had to make the tough decisions. I stand by the decisions that we made, and we understand it, Mr. Speaker.

I hear the Member again, the House Leader, talking about the \$30 million contingency fund. I have no problem – it sounds good. Why don't you take that \$30 million because you don't need it – it sounds good. Put more fuel on the fire – but that same Member when he was the minister of Municipal Affairs, he had a contingency fund in his department. Now, we passed the budget with a contingency fund. Do you know why? Because we don't know what catastrophes are going to happen during the year that we're going to need it. The same thing with

the Minister of Finance – if we have some major forest fire like we had years ago, where are the funds going to come from?

That same Member had a contingency fund in his department that he asked us to vote on – which I voted on, because I agree, you need a certain amount of funds for municipalities if a water pump breaks or if there's a major catastrophe in the town, you need it. You've got to have it, Mr. Speaker. If it's not there, what's going to happen is you're going deeper and deeper into debt. It's called planning.

The Government House Leader had that in his own department. He used that fund and I'm not criticizing him for using it. I agree. He should have used it, but he could not stand in this House before we voted for the budget and say: what are you going to use it for? He couldn't do it, and the same thing – that's planning for the Minister of Finance.

I'm just going to speak a few minutes, Mr. Speaker, on what I'm hearing across the province. I go in my district also, in the District of Humber – Bay of Islands. Do I hear about the budget? Yes. I'm not going to stand here and say I don't. I can tell you what I also hear. I hear more people telling me I'm glad you took the stand you took, instead of just letting the train keep on derailing on the tracks. That's what I'm hearing. I'm hearing yes.

I know a lot of people, Mr. Speaker. I know a lot of people wouldn't mind if I even used their names, but I wouldn't because I never asked them. They said: B'y, there are a lot of good things in the budget. A lot of things we disagree with, but you're making the right stand for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. You're making a stand for our children in the future. That's what I'm hearing around the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

When you look into the budget – I offer the Third Party to give us some suggestions. It's easy to stand here in this House to say we want this, this, this, this and this, just keep naming it off. How are we going to pay for it? That's the question we have to ask. That's the question everybody has to ask.

We all want better for our kids. We all want better for our grandkids. Everybody in this province wants better. I ask one question and I use it for anybody in this House: How are you going to have a better life for your kids if you're sinking in debt yourself? If you don't make a plan yourself to say, okay, I have to provide for the future for my kids, for his education, for our health, for our retirement, how can you do it? That's the question I have to ask.

I ask the Members opposite; you are criticizing us for \$344 million for Municipal Affairs for capital works. I think it's a lot of money to help out rural Newfoundland and Labrador, St. John's, Corner Brook and some of the major centres. It's a lot of money. It is. Are there some things in the budget we don't agree with? Yes, there are some things in the budget. There is not one person on this side of this House – there are things in the budget that we wish we didn't have to put in.

I've said it before and I'll say it again, when you're faced with a decision, you have to make that decision. I'm just glad I'm part of a group, Mr. Speaker, who said we're going to make tough decisions. Some of these decisions are hard, but we have to make them.

I spoke to a group just this Saturday. It was at a function. I spoke to three or four people at the function. It got bigger and bigger, just five or six people in the group. They said what do you really think? What I said was judge me on three years, not four months in government. That's what it said. Judge us then, Mr. Speaker, because the budget we put forward here, there are a lot of good things in that budget. There are some things we wish we never had to put forth but we did. We laid it on the table.

Mr. Speaker, we did not walk in and try to gloss it. We did not walk in and say let's push it down the road. What we're saying is we tried to put the best budget forth to balance out the needs in rural Newfoundland and Labrador – who are saying we need water and sewer, we need improvements to our roads. That's what you're facing when you're faced with a budget.

I know the Members opposite are always saying to you what are your constituents saying? Mr. Speaker, I speak to a lot of people. Most people

that called me, I tried to call them back or I did speak to them, as all Members on this side of the House do. Sure, I can tell you one thing, when they speak about the budget and you say, yes, we're going to get a bit of work done this year in water so you can have proper drinking water – oh, I didn't know that.

Mr. Speaker, some of the things in the budget that's put out there – saying this is going to cut, that's going to be cut. You sit down and say, no, that's not true. That's absolutely not true. Oh, we heard this is going to be cut. There are people in this hon. House who are making those statements, who never even came to Estimates to find out what's being cut or not being cut. Yet, they're out there saying here's what's going to be cut.

When you actually sit down, which I have done on many occasions – myself and the Member for Corner Brook attended a rally. We heard first hand, no problem. When we stayed around for an hour after and started talking to people – Mr. Speaker, some of the information that's being put out there from people who never even attended the Estimates, who never even attended the briefings we had on certain issues – they find out, oh, that's not what we were told.

Mr. Speaker, there are some issues in the budget that I can understand people – but there are a lot of good things in that budget, a lot of good things. I'll give you a good example. If the programs go ahead and if some of the recommendations that we make with our friends – and Judy Foote came through in spades with capital works for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

When you walk into some of the communities around Newfoundland and Labrador – the Members opposite also are pushing for their communities. I agree. You should. I would never, ever deny a Member the opportunity to sit down and say here are the needs of our district. That's what you should be doing. We have to work together to do it.

I'll tell you one that's going to be a proud, Mr. Speaker – people think there's no money for water and sewer, there's no money for capital works. When you walk in the communities come the fall and they can turn on their taps and have

clean drinking water, which this government made a priority, people are going to say: We didn't expect that. We thought the budget was so bad there would be no money for capital works. We didn't think we were going to get clean drinking water. We didn't think we were going to get some safety put on our roads because of the information put out there. If people had attended the Estimates they would have heard it out there – oh, there's no money for this, there's no money for capital works, there's no money for roads, there's no money for safe drinking water – that there is money.

With partnership, with the work of the Premier, the federal department and Judy Foote, we've come up with a program. The federal government and the municipalities – municipalities are also involved with this because they came through in spades. They understand when you invest in your community, when you invest in infrastructure in the community you're investing in the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. You're investing in our youth in Newfoundland and Labrador.

There is going to be no happier day for me, come the fall, when there are towns around and if the programs, which are recommended – and some may get approved. When they get approved and people turn on the water and they have clean drinking water and they can bathe their kids in drinking water, Mr. Speaker, that's what I call investments in your community. That's what I call a government who is listening to its people

We have a little hurdle here, Mr. Speaker, but I can guarantee you one thing, the people – and I know the Member for Cape St. Francis said: What are your people saying? I'll tell you what the people of Humber – Bay of Islands are saying: We have a hurdle but we faced them before. When we faced them before we took them head-on and we're going to survive. We'll be stronger when we get over this hurdle.

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

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

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

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to use just a few minutes this afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I recognize the time lost during the deliberation on the proposed amendment. I also want to give an opportunity for the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi, the Member of the NDP who brought forward this resolution, to use some time this afternoon as well. So I'm only going use a few minutes of my time to speak to this.

Mr. Speaker, there are two aspects of this, and the amendment, that's causing concern for me. I think I share this feeling with Members opposite in my caucus. We'll see as the vote takes place, but I'm fairly certain that – I think we agree on this because we agreed and believe the levy should be immediately eliminated. We fully supported that. We didn't agree with the levy from the time it was instituted. We believe for many reasons that it's wrong.

What this proposed amendment does is it changes the wording to "eliminated as soon as possible." We don't know according to who, or who determines when as soon as possible is. We don't what parameters as soon as possible is. We don't know what considerations would be given to as soon as possible, only that it's not immediately.

That's what the original motion was. It was to immediately eliminate that levy and also then to replace it based on a progressive tax principle. That's also not included in the amended wording.

It also goes on to say, more specifically "... any replacement measure be based on progressive taxation principles and further urges ...." So the idea of having progressive taxation principles is changed in this amendment. The government does not agree on the principle of progressive taxation. It doesn't agree with that because it has deleted those words.

What they also don't agree with is the words "... begin promptly to make it fairer to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians." Fairer to

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians is also removed as a result of this amendment.

Mr. Speaker, that is substantially different from what the original motion has said to the point that we can no longer – I can no longer, our caucus will no longer be able to support this resolution. It significantly changes the purpose of the motion and the meaning of it when you say you're not going to be fairer to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, you're not interested in progressive taxation principles. That speaks volumes about the problem with this levy and the problem with the budget and the problem with the approach taken by Members opposite, whose decisions are smothering the economy.

They are causing a significant hardship to low- and middle-income families. They are causing a significant hardship to seniors and students. This levy is part of that and needs to be eliminated immediately, without delay. This amendment changes those principles, when you add the levy to taxes on your home, on your vehicle, doubling of gas tax, on personal income tax increases, on the HST principles that were brought forward, when you put all of them together.

I know the Minister of Finance is on the record as saying that our taxation is fair and comparable to other provinces. Well, I argue that. I will debate that, Mr. Speaker, because I don't believe it's right. If you look at gas tax in Nova Scotia, 15.5; New Brunswick, 15.5; PEI, 13.1; Ontario, 14.3. In Newfoundland and Labrador it will become 33 cents as a result of the decisions of this government. It is relevant to the levy because it adds another level of taxation for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

To change this motion, for Members opposite to stand in their place and to say they don't agree with progressive taxation principles. That's what they'll be doing if they stand in their place. They'll be telling people of the province they don't agree with progressive taxation principles. They will also be saying they don't agree in making taxation fairer for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

If someone stands in this House and votes for the amendment, votes for the amended motion,

that's what they're saying. That they don't agree with a fairer tax, they don't agree with progressive taxation principles.

Mr. Speaker, I think anyone you talk to who understands progressive taxation principles, anyone who understands the principle of fairness will say that would simply be wrong. We won't be supporting the motion as amended.

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.

I would like to thank the Member for Topsail – Paradise for his very thoughtful, very thorough analysis of the amendment that was put forth in relation to the main motion.

On April 14, I was shocked. Late that night I sat down at my kitchen table and wrote a piece I posted on my Facebook page. I am heartbroken, absolutely heartbroken. We all knew how tough our fiscal situation was in Newfoundland and Labrador, how the past government squandered our prosperity by not investing long term and by shackling us with the enormous cost of a huge megaproject.

Now this government has squandered the opportunity to start to turn things around. This budget is without vision. Rather than work towards real diversification using our incredible hardworking, innovative people and creating jobs, no, instead they have chosen to choke out every bit of life out of our own people.

They had the opportunity to be bold and instead they nicked and dimed departments and are squeezing every possible penny they can with fees and inequitable taxes. To what end? A job loss is not a move forward. Real strategies for diversification and job creation, now that's moving forward. I thought perhaps, in spite of all the posturing and doom and gloom, they'd come up with something, anything that would compel us forward.



In November, so many people had put their trust in this government to help steer us through these tough times. Instead, they have stalled in their tracks unable to lead us one step forward. This was an opportunity. I am heartbroken; I am heartbroken for our beautiful Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, much has happened since that day that the Premier and his Finance Minister presented their first budget to the people of the province, a budget that was to be the blueprint to begin the promises they had made to the people only three months previously; no job cuts, no increase in the HST and a real plan for diversification. We were all waiting, holding our collective breath, hoping that their promise of a plan to move us forward would show leadership, innovation, creativity, vision, real job creation and bold steps. Then we could let out a collective sigh together.

Instead, we all gasped in disbelief. The wind was knocked right out of us. It didn't take long and people started to see the details: court closures; school closures; HST increases; gas tax increases; tax on home and auto insurance; tax on books; program cuts; Adult Dental Program cuts; over-the-counter drug program cuts, especially vital to seniors and people with chronic illness; cancellation of the Parental Support Benefit; the Home Heating Rebate; the PST year-end rebate. The dozens and dozens of increased and new fees; job losses, job losses, job losses and more to come. Then the levy, the unfair regressive flat tax Liberal levy.

Mr. Speaker, it didn't take long for people to figure out themselves how unfair and regressive this budget really was, in spite of the Seniors' Benefit and the Income Supplement benefit for which many working people wouldn't be eligible for, are not eligible for. The levy was perhaps the clarion call, the epitome of it all.

Once people absorbed what this budget was going to do, the wave started right across the whole province. People started writing the Premier, their MHAs. All our offices were flooded – absolutely flooded – with phone calls. Long, involved conversations about why this budget was not going to restore us to a stable economy.

People organized rallies, demonstrations and petitions. They talked at their post offices, their kitchen tables, on open line shows, at their churches and around the water coolers. The people of the province could see that this budget was not about fairness, nor was it the promised plan to harness the energy and the power of our working people who were all willing to roll up their sleeves and work together to create a new economy based on progressive and fair taxation, resourcefulness, hard work, commitment, determination and hope. A plan that would use our fishery, our farmers, our engineers, our teachers, our natural resources, our wind, our water, our community leaders, our artists and our seniors who have so much experience and expertise to offer.

Our innovative and creative youth, our displaced workers in the oil and mining industry who are forming – at this moment – a movement to use their skills as plumbers, electricians and pipefitters to create jobs in green technology because government isn't doing it, because government is not leading them. Then was the announcement of the closure of over half our libraries. The outrage grew.

People continue to push their MHAs to do the right thing and vote against this budget. People do not support it because they know it is not a plan forward. They especially want their MHAs to vote against the levy. They know it is unfair.

Folks who have lots of money know it is unfair to average working families. They know it is unfair to young working families who have mortgages, car payments, child care costs and student loans to pay. They know it is unfair to young people starting out on their careers, people just earning enough to get by and who are not relying on our social safety nets. People are outraged at this government.

This government, who they trusted to truly represent them, who they expected to honour the very clear concrete promises they made when they came knocking on people's doors looking for their vote. They trusted them to keep their word. To come up with a plan that would build a better way forward for our province because they knew the tough economic situation that we are in.

People see instead, this government's short-sighted unfair budget is stalling and shrinking our economy and squeezing hard our working people, people trying to make a living to support their families and their communities, squeezing them dry.

This levy is expected to bring in \$129 million annually. It's not new money. It's not newly produced or generated money from diversification. It is money taken out of the pockets of our hard-working people, people who did not create this huge debt. People who did not create this huge deficit, people who benefitted the least from our prosperity, yet, are asking and being forced to bear a heavier burden of the crisis.

It's a lot of money. What if government truly had a smart, innovative diversification plan that created new ways to generate money for the province or a real progressive tax structure that looked at our levels of taxation for corporation, for all income earners and a review of our royalty regimes? What if it found other ways to cut waste like going line by line by line before handing over \$1.3 billion to Nalcor for a megaproject we couldn't afford in the first place? What if? What if they actually used approaches that got more people working because our crisis is an employment crisis and it is growing?

What we have learned is that people matter. The people of the province understand there are better ways to move forward. They are insisting on being heard. They are outraged that this government is not listening. They won't be fooled by lip service nor placated by MHAs saying, yes, it's a bad budget but we had to do it. We had no choice. Every aspect of this budget is a choice made.

The Minister of Finance has reminded us that she went line by line by line just like an accountant. The Premier and his team all ran for office on a pack of promises. A pack of promises they all supported and endorsed. This budget is all about choices. Regardless of what mess the previous government made and left, every MHA in this House made a promise to their community that they will represent them and said they were up for the challenge.

It's time for government to stop bellyaching about the past government's deeds or misdeeds and embrace their job. The people of Newfoundland and Labrador know there is a better way forward. They are willing to play their part. They will not rest until they are heard. Teachers who are teaching our children, nurses who are caring for our sick, seniors who have built our prosperity, municipal leaders who are running our communities are all speaking out. Writers are writing, students are demonstrating outside their schools, their universities and colleges. People are standing up for their libraries, displaced oil workers and people who provide our valuable public services.

Where is the Population Growth Strategy we so desperately need in a rapidly aging society? Where is the plan to keep our well-educated working young people in our province? We know there is a difference between the way Alberta and Newfoundland are handling their financial crisis. We know it's not comparing apples to apples. We know there are great differences.

What is common is that both Newfoundland and Alberta have lots of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Both have oil industries that have been hit hard. Both have huge deficits. Our debt far outweighs the debt of Alberta; however, Premier Notley's approach has been to lead her people to create jobs, to create new revenue. That has not been the approach of this government. We have Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who are willing to roll up their sleeves and do the work that's necessary together to get us out of this mess, if there were leadership to do so. Tom Baird from Memorial University says: What does it mean to watch our middle class implode?

The people of Newfoundland and Labrador are demanding that their government listen to them. They are standing up for fairness. They want a more progressive tax system. They want strong public services. They want to work. They want to treat each other with respect and dignity and they want that from their government. They want a plan that gets the economy back on track. As shown in the thousands and thousands of petitions, emails, letters and phone calls, they want the Premier and their MHAs to immediately cancel their unfair, regressive levy.

Mr. Speaker, I have before me an online petition that has been signed by over 18,000 people from all over Newfoundland and Labrador, not 1,800 but 18,000. It's not just their signature. There are thousands and thousands and thousands of comments they have written as well wanting to be heard by their government. I will offer this to the Premier if he has not already seen it.

They are begging to be listened to. They know the situation. They understand the fiscal situation that the province is in. They also understand the impact and the trickle-down effect of this budget on their communities and on their families.

Mr. Speaker, final, I ask this government: Will they listen? I ask the MHAs on the other side of the House: Will they listen? Will they truly listen with the intent of really hearing what their constituents have to say? Will they listen with the intent of hearing and not give lip service, but actually defend the dignity of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador? Will they listen to the experts, the academics, our nurses, our teachers, our seniors, our workers, the people of the province who have put their trust in them so that together we can work our way out of the financial situation we have?

We are looking for leadership that will harness the energy of every single person in this province, to lead us to economic prosperity once again.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

It's certainly an honour again to rise in this hon. House. Any time any of us rises, it's certainly an honour. I will continue to say that and thank the people of Placentia West – Bellevue who put me here. It is our job, as the Member for St. John's Centre says, to represent our constituents and speak on their behalf. I commend the Member for St. John's Centre on her passion for her constituents and for the province as a whole. I think she's right. It's very important to listen to

people, but the Member for St. John's Centre doesn't have a monopoly on listening to people.

I can tell her I have been listening to my constituents each and every day. As I've said here before, time and time again, each night I'm on the phone with my constituents, listening to their concerns and explaining to them the facts that are not getting out there because Members of the Opposition continue to put out facts that are sometimes not the truth. I say to Members opposite, I think we should have a conversation about the budget and where we are. I think we should speak with informed opinions rather than spreading information that not all the time is the case.

When we brought in *Budget 2016*, Mr. Speaker, it contained a number of measures that were aimed at solving the huge financial problem we were left with when we took over in December. We knew it was going to be a difficult budget. We knew it would not be easy to tell people how bad things were, but immediately upon taking office in December, the Premier and Finance Minister, on December 22, issued the mid-year update that was somehow illusive throughout the fall that we couldn't get, and told the people of the province frankly and truly the fiscal mountain we had to climb.

From day one of taking office, we have been nothing but forthright with the people on the gravity and the seriousness of the situation we were left to face. These issues we discuss here are not black and white. It's not black and white that this budget is all bad or all good. There are shades of grey here, Mr. Speaker, in the sense that this budget – yes, there are tough measures contained within, but there are also positive things.

Positive things like \$570 million for infrastructure spending in the province this year; \$2 million for a broadband initiative that for my district, a rural district, it is very important, Mr. Speaker. There's money in there for health care; for education; and money invested into the Income Supplement and the Seniors' Benefit.

Things that the Opposition, the Member for St. John's Centre doesn't want to talk about. At the expense of uplifting oratory, the Member for St. John's Centre doesn't want to talk about those

things. I think it's important if we are to have a true conversation about this budget that we talk about everything within it, the hard and the not so hard.

This budget contains revenue measures that will impact most Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We are very well aware that this is an impact that we are asking our people to accept. It is not lost on me, Mr. Speaker, that every time I return to my district as I have, every weekend since this budget – many of us, all of us have returned to our districts. It is not lost on me that we are asking people to make a sacrifice. That we are telling people that there will be an impact to the decisions that we've taken.

If anyone thinks that we don't understand that, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, I certainly understand and empathize with the people of this province that they thought their affairs were being managed properly and they come to wake up and find out that \$25 billion worth of oil money was spent, was thrown down the drain, and here we are left with a new government coming into office and we have to clean up a mess. Mr. Speaker, this government, we are committed to doing that, to taking decisions that are right – not easy.

We had to make a number of difficult decisions, because we were left with no other choice. Because the debt that we pass forward, Mr. Speaker, as the Leader of the NDP has said, will shackle the next generation, and I agree wholeheartedly with him.

These were not decisions that any of us wanted to have to make but we knew that if we did nothing, we would be placing our province and future generations of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in a more serious financial mess. The debt per capita for everyone in Newfoundland and Labrador, I believe it is around \$22,000, \$23,000. If we did nothing, that number would escalate to \$53,000 in the next five years.

In our 66 years since Confederation, we have managed to accrue about \$12 billion in net debt and if we did nothing, Mr. Speaker, that number would double in the next five years. I think it is worth reminding the Members opposite and

those who are watching at home, that we are currently spending more on interest payments than on the education of our children in this province. I, for one, find that extremely concerning, the fact that we are putting out good money after bad in interest payments because of the decisions that were taken previously.

We hear a lot about what economists are saying, Mr. Speaker. I want to read into the record something that was said by an economist from the University of Calgary, Ron Kneebone. "Newfoundland's interpretation of the fall in the oil price is that oil is not going to come back any time soon. So rather than accumulate a whole bunch of debt, waiting, hoping, praying that oil prices will come back, they decided to take action to close the deficit. Alberta seems to be deciding to do the opposite."

"And then you have to decide: Are oil prices going to come back any time soon? It's a very high risk budgeting strategy to just hope that they do, and do nothing in between."

Mr. Speaker, that statement, I think, accurately reflects the choices that we had to make versus the choices the Members opposite certainly made, and that the government in Alberta makes today.

A senior economist with BMO, Robert Kavcic, he says, quote: There was zero appetite for Newfoundland and Labrador's debt continuing; the budget makes Newfoundland's bonds more saleable.

The credit rating agencies have responded positively to the steps that have been taken. And yes, these are very difficult decisions, tough decisions, certainly not decisions that in my first five months in office I wanted to be confronted with, Mr. Speaker. But the facts are the facts and we were confronted with a situation that we had no choice but to react to.

The plan that you see in place today, Mr. Speaker, it is for hope; it is for the future. We hear Members opposite continuously say that there is no hope; there is no plan. Mr. Speaker, I can tell you, I respect the role of Opposition in terms of their role of holding government to account, but I believe it is incumbent upon Members opposite to speak of all the facts in this

budget, including the fact that seniors are better off.

My grandmother just passed away last fall. I can't even imagine living on such a small income, but I can tell you, one thing that this government did is preserve the integrity of seniors and their income, and, in fact, enhance it because we recognize that these are the people who built our society and we now must serve to protect them in their vulnerable years as well.

So I believe it is incumbent upon all of us to talk about where we are going, where we are today and where we are moving forward. I believe there is hope. I'll tell you it's about choices. The Members opposite talk about choices. The choice of doing nothing is not an option, Mr. Speaker. The choice of building a plan for the future, a future for young Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to stay here, as I've said, I believe there is lots to stay here for. I can tell you right now I'm in support of the amendment put forward by the Minister of Education to make this private Member's resolution amendable to all of us.

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.

I'm going to have to say before anything else, this is probably one of the hardest times that we've gone through a private Member's motion in this House. I can't believe what's happening here today, I really can't.

Before I go on and talk about that I will thank the Members who have stood and have taken the time to take part in the debate: the Member for Mount Scio, for Ferryland, Humber – Bay of Islands, Topsail – Paradise, my colleague for St. John's Centre and the Member for Placentia West – Bellevue. We obviously have very different opinions in this House right now on the motion and certainly on the amendment. I cannot believe the game the government is playing bringing in an amendment that, in my

mind, changes the meaning of the motion that I brought to this floor.

The motion that I brought to this floor spoke to the urgency of not putting the levy in place. That's why the motion says to immediately eliminate, not when government thinks they might be able to do it. The thing is, it's wrong. The levy is wrong.

I point out to the government the hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of emails we've gotten. They're not all from people who vote NDP. They might be really surprised to hear that. I have had so many, and I haven't had the time – I've been trying to read them all and respond to them – to count how many say: Ms. Michael, I voted for the Liberals because I trusted them, never again. That's what we're getting.

We're getting it from people who voted for this government. They're the ones who are saying this levy cannot happen. They have completely changed the meaning of what I brought to this floor. I am shocked by the game they're playing and it is a game. If they think people aren't seeing it that way, they have another thing coming.

We had an elderly woman walk out of the gallery here today shouting, she is so upset. We had a woman in Bonavista – a woman who presumably, it seems, never ever has done anything like it before in her life – out of total frustration brought her RV to one door of the CNA campus and a truck to the other one so that the equipment, et cetera, couldn't be taken out of the building as she thought might be happening.

We have people who are coming out in hundreds and hundreds at demonstrations in communities where they don't come out. In Gambo, 200 people turning out to a demonstration; our small communities around the province, 3,000 on our doorstep here last weekend. People saying this is wrong.

My colleague brought forward the electronic petition that we couldn't formally present as a petition in the House, but you can't run away, Mr. Speaker. We can't run away from the fact that 18,000 people, a minimum – and the man who started this is still getting them – 18,000 people sat, did it, and wrote messages, and

they're not all NDP voters. They're people who trusted this government. Now they're playing this game with them – and they recognize the game for what it is. They recognize it for what it is.

I cannot understand how they can keep going the way they're going, and twisting their own words. We have proven, and others than us have also proven that there is no way the Income Support they put in place will cover all of the increases in taxation and the loss of services that are in that budget. We've proven it. People who have calculated for themselves every single tax that's there and loss of service and fee that's there. Middle-class people saying it's \$3,000 extra for next year, it's \$6,000 extra, it's \$4,000. Then the next question is, where is it coming from?

I can't understand it, Mr. Speaker. They're sitting there like they're not hearing a thing. How can they be so blinded? How can they continue the way they're going? Some days I don't know and some days I'm frustrated. Some days I'm sad, but most of the time now I'm really angry because people are suffering. They're frightened, they're terrified. I am not saying those words, making them up because that's my interpretation. It's because they are the words that are in the messages we are getting. They are the words that are there.

Some of the language is not that pretty. There's one sentence I read today, I said I wish I could read that out in the House of Assembly to show how upset the person is – but I will respect the House and I won't.

So, I'm tired of putting the facts, and again, I'm not accepting somebody telling me that what I'm putting out are not facts because they are. I am not twisting anything. I am putting things as we are proving them. I am tired of people saying we aren't putting out right information. Well, we are. They are not listening.

I'm tired of speaking to what the levy means. I'm tired of saying what's involved in this budget. We will have several more days yet when we will have pieces of legislation where we will be allowed to continue, because we will have legislation that's going to be trying to put the levy in place. Well, we are going to make

sure we use as much of that time as we can to speak to that. We will have legislation that will talk about the tax on gas, 16.5 cents. We will speak to that. We will have the legislation that's talking about putting the HST up 2 per cent. We will speak to that.

When you do the litany of everything that's in that budget and when you look at the 10 pages where government actually said, we will list out all the initiatives, then in most cases giving no rationale for those initiatives. Just saying this will cause a change to programs, this will make a little bit of a change. Not, what is the impact on people?

When they talk about their budget, they never use the word people. They never talk about the people. It's doing the cuts to save money because we might have a higher debt. Well, do you know what? We don't have the highest debt per GDP in the country. We don't.

What we need from this government is to at least take one thing that is really going to cause such an extra burden on the backs of people, take that one thing and don't do it. That's all we're asking. There's so much more we could ask, but that's what people are demanding. That's what the petition that I've been presenting and my colleague has been presenting, and in another form I think the Official Opposition has presented some similar prayers to the House, asking to stop the levy. That's what my motion today is based on.

The people who are writing are not saying maybe they'll do it next year, maybe they'll do it the year after or maybe six-months' time. It is: Don't let the levy happen, Ms. Michael, please. That's what's coming to me in the emails, and emails they're receiving from people. People who voted for them. People who voted for the Liberals because they said they trusted them. That's what they're saying to them because they copy us. We're all getting that. A lot of those emails are going to all MHAs. They're telling the Premier why they voted Liberal and they're saying: I'm not voting again because you have betrayed our trust. You're not worrying about people.

They keep pushing the enhanced Seniors' Benefit and the Income Support piece. They

keep pushing that saying, look how much we care, look how much we care. Without doing the whole mathematics on what really the picture is of those two groups and totally ignoring middle-income people at the time they do it. It's almost that, oh, aren't we wonderful people, we're taking care of low-income people and the seniors and everybody is supposed to be happy. Well, people aren't happy. Middle-income people are not happy. I've already read a number of messages in this House of Assembly showing that they aren't. I will continue reading them because people want their message here in the House.

I've promised I will continue reading them, and I will continue reading them. The real shame, the real piece that is disturbing us today, disturbing me – because I am disturbed, my colleagues are disturbed on this side of the House. My colleague in my caucus is disturbed. We're all disturbed that government is not taking this seriously and this sham of putting this resolution, this amendment to our motion here on the floor – because it's a sham; it's disgraceful. It is absolutely disgraceful.

I feel ashamed. I definitely will be standing and voting against it, obviously, but we shouldn't even have to do that. They should be ashamed for doing this and for continuing to tell people that they don't know what's really going to happen to them. Oh, you're going to be okay. Don't worry, darling; everything is going to be fine. Well, it's not going to be. It is not going to be.

People I'm speaking to are saying: Ms. Michael, what is going to be like in a year's time when we actually live through having to pay all these extra fees and extra taxes? What is it going to be like for us? They don't know.

At the same time, we know that there are people who are being laid off. One of the emails actually – I can't find it right now but I certainly can remember what's in it. A woman saying she works for Eastern Health and she said today I sat and cried when five of my colleagues got the pink slips. I mean, that's real; that's happening.

They can dress up the language all they want with regard to the loss of jobs. Real people right now are losing jobs. It is not just by attrition; it's

not just by vacancies being there and not filling vacancies. We heard that over and over and over again in the Estimates, over and over again; four gone here, three gone but they were vacant, and they hadn't been filled for a year and so we are not filling them.

There are two things about that: one, work is not getting done; and two, our young people are not going to be able to enter into the public service because positions are going. But they are using that language and not saying but real people are also getting pink slips.

When I read that email from the woman saying she sat today and cried because five or her colleagues had pink slips, tears came to my eyes. I am not being dramatic; tears came to my eyes because it's a helpless feeling knowing that you can't do anything about it and then to have this amendment allowed to be on the floor has really upset me because it totally goes against what we wanted here in the House today.

This game that the government is playing of pushing this word "temporary," and it's their mantra, led by the Premier, it does not face the fact of what the levy does and what the levy is. It doesn't matter if it's a week, a year, two years, a month, it's wrong and it should be gone. We shouldn't have to be facing it here in this House.

That's all I have to say, Mr. Speaker. I'll just take my seat.

Thank you.

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

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

All those in favour?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Those against?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Nay.

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

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

Division

**MR. SPEAKER:** Are the Whips ready?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Yes.

**MR. SPEAKER:** All those in favour of the amendment, please rise.

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

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

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

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

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

**CLERK:** Mr. Speaker, the ayes: 28; the nays: 10.

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

On motion, amendment carried.

**MR. SPEAKER:** All those in favour of the motion, as amended?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Nay.

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

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

Division

**MR. SPEAKER:** Are the whips ready?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Yes.

**MR. SPEAKER:** All those in favour of the motion, as amended, please rise.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** All those against the motion, as amended?

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

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

Mr. Speaker, the ayes: 28; the nays: 10.

**MR. SPEAKER:** I declare the motion, as amended, passed.

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