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Speaker: Honourable Tom Osborne, MHA

Wednesday

8 March 2017

The House met at 10 a.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Orders of the Day

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

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

I would call from the Order Paper, Motion 1 regarding Interim Supply.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform the House that I have received a message from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

All rise.

A message from His Honour the Lieutenant Governor:

As Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, I transmit a request to appropriate sums required for the Public Service of the province for the year ending 31 March 2018, by way of Interim Supply, and in accordance with the provisions of sections 54 and 90 of the *Constitution Act, 1867*, I recommend this request to the House of Assembly.

Sgd.: _____

Frank F. Fagan, CM, ONL, MBA
Lieutenant Governor

Please be seated.

The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

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

I moved, seconded by the Minister of Justice and Public Safety that the message, together with a bill, be referred to a Committee of Supply.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is that the message together with a bill be referred to a Committee of Supply and that I do now leave the Chair.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Warr): Order, please!

We are considering the resolution and Bill 71, An Act For Granting To Her Majesty Certain Sums Of Money For Defraying Certain Expenses Of The Public Service For The Financial Year Ending March 31, 2018 And For Other Purposes Relating To The Public Service.

Resolution

Be it resolved by the House of Assembly in Legislative Session convened, as follows:

“That it is expedient to introduce a measure to provide for the granting to Her Majesty for defraying certain expenses of the public service for the financial year ending March 31, 2018, the sum of \$2,703,698,200.”

CHAIR: Shall the resolution carry?

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

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

And before I speak to Bill 71, I just want to take a quick moment to wish my colleagues in the House and those in the gallery and those watching at home, Happy International Women's Day.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Chair, this morning we are going to be discussing Bill 71, An Act for Granting to Her Majesty Certain Sums of Money for Defraying Certain Expenses of the Public Service for the Financial Year Ending March 31, 2018 and for Other Purposes Relating to the Public Service.

Mr. Chair, I rise in the House today, and it's truly an honour again to speak in this House. As many Members of the House would appreciate, Interim Supply and this particular bill is required to be passed by the House of Assembly to allow for the financial administration in support of ongoing operations of government departments during in the interim period while Budget 2017 is being introduced, debated, approved by the Legislature.

When we bring in the budget, we will be seeking approval for funding to spend for the entire fiscal year, but it will take time to allow for debate and approval of the budget. During the interim period, it is necessary to provide funding to the government departments, so that they can continue to pay their staff and their suppliers of goods and services. In other words, the ongoing work of the core public services must continue, which is the purpose of Interim Supply.

Mr. Chair, we are seeking approval in Interim Supply for a sum of approximately \$2.7 billion dollars. And this represents approximately 32 per cent of the 2016-17 budgeted current and capital account gross expenditures. While the 32 per cent is a little less to the 2016-17 Interim Supply, 2017-18 Interim Supply represents a 3.2 per cent decrease of approximately \$88 million dollars from last year's Interim Supply bill. This decrease primarily relates to a decrease in investment requirements for Nalcor Energy over the interim period.

The legislation will need to be passed and receive Royal Assent by March 26, 2017 in order to allow sufficient time to ensure that

payroll and income support payments, particularly for those that have to be mailed to Labrador, and available, when due, in early April of 2017. Interim Supply provides departments and public bodies with the necessary cash flow dollars to manage expenditures for the period from April 1 to June 30 of 2017, which is the first quarter of the fiscal year. This includes ongoing housekeeping expenditures, including funding for upcoming pay periods and ongoing project and funding requirements applicable to 2016-17 fiscal year.

This Interim Supply bill makes provisions for the transfer of funds from the Department of Finance to other departments for expenditures for compensation, benefits and other associated adjustments. Examples include step adjustments. It includes transfers from Consolidated Fund Service accounts to other departments for special retirement and other payments should they be necessary, such as severance payments, and transfer of funds to and from various heads of expenditures to facilitate expenditures for financial assistance as may be approved from time to time by Treasury Board.

Interim Supply is an important bill that is intended to provide for the continuation of ongoing government programs, services and projects. And as I've said, this bill needs to be passed to continue the routine and ongoing operations while Budget 2017 is going through the Legislature for debate and approval.

Going into Budget 2017, our province continues to face a difficult fiscal situation that continues to change with the price of oil and other economic pressures. As a government, we are committed to make core government more efficient and focused.

This past November, Premier Ball launched *The Way Forward: A vision for sustainability and growth in Newfoundland and Labrador*. The vision will guide government's actions to achieve greater efficiency, strengthen the province's economic foundation, enhance services and improve outcomes to promote a healthy and prosperous province. The vision provides clear plans for growing the economy and providing quality services while restoring fiscal balances.

In total, *The Way Forward* includes more than 50 initiatives, all of which contribute to achieving the fiscal target set in *Budget 2016* to return to surplus within seven years while maintaining quality programs and services.

The initiatives in the vision are focused on four areas: achieving a more efficient public sector, providing a stronger economic foundation, providing better services, and supporting better outcomes.

Our goals include: achieving deficit reduction targets, eliminating excess, and employing an overall approach that ensures all spending decisions are justified on a year-by-year basis with no automatic assumptions about spending from one year to the next.

Last month, we implemented our new Flatter, Leaner Management Structure within the provincial government. Flatter, Leaner Management is expected to save approximately \$20-\$25 million annually in salaries and benefits. Employees who leave government, regardless of circumstances, are entitled to the cash equivalent of their unused leave time and severance, nine years of service or more, and these costs are already included in government's liabilities.

The only additional one-time cost related to the decisions made as a result of Flatter, Leaner Management is related to the pay in lieu of notice. Government expects approximately \$15 million will be reflected in salary expenses in 2016-17 to cover costs associated with pay in lieu of notice.

Mr. Chair, Newfoundland and Labrador remains at a critical juncture and it is important that we continue to work together to address our fiscal challenges. We are pleased that we have improved our fiscal performance but the seriousness of the fiscal situation remains and must continue to be addressed. Through the implementation of the vision, government will continue to practice strong fiscal management on behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Chair, as I conclude my remarks, I would like to say it was an honour to have the opportunity to speak on this important piece of

legislation. I look forward to hearing from my colleagues who will speak to this Interim Supply bill.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's an honour to stand in this House on our unique Wednesday morning to debate Bill 71, Interim Supply. There's no doubt, we all agree, Interim Supply is necessary. As the government of the day prepares its budget, no doubt we have to ensure that our civil servants and the programs and services that we fund are sustainable and are able to continue.

I say with some sense of dismay about the fact that we're having to do this in a particular time when there are so many civil servants who are on a level of terrible misunderstanding of what's happening, where their jobs are, where their futures are, the plan that this government has for being able to sustain the civil service and offer proper programs. The morale is non-existent here. There's continued confusion within the process.

I've had conversations only as recently as last night with some front-line staff, some directors, some managers who are totally confused about positions going out the door and then other positions coming in that don't fit the needs of a particular program and are not aligned with a better way or a more efficient way of doing things.

Everybody agrees; there's not a civil servant who won't agree that we need to find efficient ways to do things. And efficient ways to do things means to be engaging the people who would have an understanding of what can work. That particularly means the union representatives, it means the front-line staff, it means your middle management and at times it means your senior executive. So when you first start cutting senior executive, then you start

losing a resource there around how the programs were implemented, what their intent was.

There's no doubt, there may be some programs here that have outlived their usefulness or need to be modified or we've been able to find a better way of implementing them through partnerships with the private sector, the not-for-profit sector, or there may be a better use of technology to ensure the economy of scale works for the taxpayers and that we receive the best use of the money being invested. Nobody will disagree or argue with that.

The plan, or the lack of plan we've seen and the example here with interim funding, really doesn't put us on a better footing for financial stability here. All it does is make things more confusing. All it does is hinder how we're going to offer programs. What it does, it's a scare tactic here to turn off investment, to turn off the morale within government, to turn off the creative ideas that people in this province have, because they have no idea of exactly where we're going with this. That concerns me, it worries me. It worries me for my children who are in their post-secondary education years and what their future will entail down the road.

The minister had noted that we're in a better financial footing, and praised themselves for doing that. We may have more money in the bank only because we've taken more out of the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and in some cases at the expense of their health, their well-being and their education. Not good enough. That's not how you do good governance.

While interim funding is necessary to get us to that point, I would hope, and I implore that this administration has a better plan in this budget than they did in last year's budget. Because we know, we're still hearing the fallout. We're still feeling the negative impacts. We're seeing that the economy hasn't picked up, that there was no diversification that was part of the master plan.

The seven or eight or different types of tours and going forward plans and all these things, none of them have come to fruition because they weren't thought out properly and they didn't engage the right people. There was a haphazard approach to dealing with the fiscal situation. And there's no

doubt, there's no doubt, nobody will argue that there were financial challenges.

We said it over on this side of the House. We echoed that there was a tough job that had to be done over there, but we also encouraged you to be engaged in how that job needed to be done and how you did it. Not at the expense of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, but you had a tempered approach that over a period of time would still instill the economy to move forward, would still put into people the faith that they have in this province, and particularly would encourage the young people to stay here, achieve their education levels, become productive citizens, raise their families here, be the leaders of the future.

This was what I was hoping would be the stellar stamp of the new administration, but it couldn't have been further from the truth. What we've done is stymie the economy, turn people away from coming to Newfoundland and Labrador and investing, getting our young people now saying they don't want to leave but they have to leave. And we know there are people who have left – we've seen with our population drop. We've seen the professionals leaving. We've seen those small middle businesses closing up and saying it's not viable any more.

With the tax increases here, with things like levies, we've seen the social sector cry out about tax on books, about cuts to youth organizations, about closures of libraries. How many times have we had to go back to really look at again what decisions were made and knowing that they weren't in the best interest of the people of the province? And we've done it on libraries. The one thing I will applaud the minister on, at least he listened to the pressure to go out and look at it.

I can't agree with hiring a consultant company to go out and look at whether or not we now can use technology better, or partner in certain areas to make libraries more efficient after he announced and put everybody on the edge, and had the communities in an uproar about the service being offered, by doing that. Good due diligence, that would have been part of the process this time last year. So that whatever decisions you had to make in that budget, would have actually still fit the needs of those

communities and the needs of those particular programs and services.

A year later and \$300,000 in consulting fees, and \$1.5 million dollars that you were supposedly going to save, that isn't in the coffers now, and keeping every community and library on the edge of not knowing should they try to enhance their programs, are they going to be around, should they try to fundraise to invest in their particular library, should they try to upgrade their use of technology – not knowing.

So we've lost a year of being able to grow our libraries in this province because you didn't have a plan. And the minister didn't have a strategy of what they were doing. It was an exercise with a calculator. You did a great job with it; it was easy to punch in numbers and say I want 30 per cent, I want 40 per cent, I want 20 per cent –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: – but it didn't serve the purpose. It didn't serve the purpose. The purpose was to make it more efficient, to ensure that people still received programs and services that they're entitled to here, and that we got the best return on the taxpayers' investment. That's what it was all about.

That was the exercise I thought that you were going through. I thought that it was going to be, at the end of the day, something that even on this side of the House we would have to get up and nod and say, hats off. You went through a proper process, you put in play a system that is efficient, it's equitable and, at the end of the day, it will keep Newfoundland and Labrador on the right path to prosperity and ensure our young get to stay here, our seniors are taken care of.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: That we have equity when it comes to employment across the table, and that people in other parts of the country, other parts of the world will say Newfoundland and Labrador is a great place to invest; a great place to come and visit; it's great place to come and say we can develop partnerships here. We can

use the technology and the expertise in this part of the world to grow whatever product or whatever service they provide anywhere else in the world.

But we didn't do that. That wasn't what was done. The government, through the budget last year and the programs and services and the cuts and the fear mongering when it came to the civil service about having another budget to let people know there are going to be people laid off, and then saying no, we're not doing that because we've got to think about what we're doing –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: – now we're going to do it, but we're not doing it with consultation, we're doing it in-house.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

I remind hon. Members that everybody here will have an opportunity to speak, and I ask that you give people the time to have their say and show a little bit more respect.

Thank you.

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I do realize that some of Members over there are confused about what went on, because no doubt they heard the same complaints or the same challenges from their own constituents as I did, about what was happening here. And again, there's none of us, none of us in this House that doesn't accept the reality that we have a financial challenge. But we do accept that we're all in this together, and there has to be a way, with a plan, that we can move Newfoundland and Labrador forward without being devastating to certain sectors.

The sectors that we're picking on here are young people. We're picking on seniors. We're picking

on the middle income. We're picking on those in the education system. We're picking on those in the health care system, and we're picking on the civil service. So there's not many left there that you haven't picked on. So that's why there are people in an uproar in this province. They're in an uproar because people will take an understanding and take the direction around they have to give – they have to give to keep Newfoundland and Labrador sustainable.

We've been doing it for the last 500 years. But they need to know what they're taking is going in the right direction. It's part and parcel of a bigger plan to move things forward. None of that's been indicated with the Liberal administration. It wasn't indicated in last year's budget; it definitely hasn't been indicated in the year since then, around programs and services, and how you engage the economy and how you diversify. There have been no examples of that.

There has been nothing here with the negotiations with the labour movement, about how we get to a point where it's sustainable and we still offer programs and services that benefit the people of this province. The engagement process hasn't been there. It's been questionable about speaking out of both sides of your mouth and one side you're saying one thing and the other side you're doing the exact opposite. And that's confused people. That's totally confused people.

AN HON. MEMBER: Wow.

MR. BRAZIL: That's what it is; it is a wow moment. Because people have said to me look, I voted Liberal. I voted based on the principle because I thought they'd come in with a plan to move things forward and I thought it was time for a change and I thought there'd be new energy, new initiatives, a new process. I did understand they were going to face some challenges. There were going to be some financial challenges there. They were going to have to find a new efficient way to do things. They were going to have develop new partnerships.

They would have to engage people in society in the private sector and the not-for-profit sector, the public sector, to find ways to make things work for the citizens of Newfoundland and

Labrador. And they would have to prioritize, what is it that's important to people in this province. How do we engage in the post-secondary institutions? Do we modify some of the programs and services that we offer so that we're more competitive on the national, international market?

Do we also look at how we better use our primary education system to ensure that people are ready for every sector of life as they grow? How do we ensure that the expertise that our older citizens have doesn't get lost, that we can draw down on that? We have tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, of people in this province who have an experience in different factors of life; how do we engage that asset and use it to our benefit?

That's what people are looking for. People had felt maybe the previous administration had been there for a period of time, they've gotten stale, maybe they've exhausted most of their ideas – and fair enough; I'll give people the credit – that was a rationale reason to vote a different way; no argument with that. But the disappointment I'm seeing on people who come to me now and admit they voted a different way and are disappointed that there wasn't a plan; there is no process here.

The planned process was from day one. As one of your former leaders had said, you had a great plan to get elected but no plan to govern. So now we're asking, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are asking you, give us your plan, outline your plan, but make sure your plan works for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. And I mean it works for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, not those who have a high income who can sustain all the hits that they're taking now from tax increases, from levies, from cuts in services, from not being able to provide basic health care and education that we've accepted as a God-given right for the last 100 years here.

Now, all of a sudden, we're going to fall back. Newfoundland and Labrador has come too far because of the great work done by the business community here, the social sector here, the volunteer sector and the public service on a national, international basis to fall behind again because your administration doesn't have a plan

on how we're going to deal with our debt and how we're going to engage and diversify it and grow the economy and how you're going to partner with your federal government to ensure we get our equity here and we get what we're entitled to. That's part of the process here.

Now, there may not have been a great working relationship with the previous administration provincially and federally; can't change that. It is what it is. But you're the government of the day. You have a government in Ottawa that's of the same political stripe, so I would hope that the connection there would mean that we would get more than a fair share. I haven't seen that. I've seen a few tidbit announcements here and there.

The former administration in Ottawa did the same here, it's just it wasn't a big splash. We didn't do all that because there wasn't that comradery at the time, but there were still monies, hundreds of millions of dollars invested in Newfoundland and Labrador.

What we need now is some leadership at the national level and at the provincial level to ensure we get through the financial challenges we're going through right now. That we find a partnership and we find ways to sustain that so we're not always cutting and cutting and cutting so we fall behind, and we're not always taxing and taxing until our citizens say I can't take anymore, I'm leaving. I'm going to pay taxes, well I'm going to pay them somewhere where I'm going to get a service and it's not just on the backs of me and my family. I want to know I got a future.

People are not afraid to take money out of their pocket to help sustain Newfoundland and Labrador. Not one of my constituents, not one of the people I've spoken to as I travelled across this province has said they're not willing to invest in it.

The people in the hospitality industry, they realize they need to do their part to grow the industry but they can't be taxed to death. They can't do on one hand try to invest money into a program and a service so that they can sell that as part of our diversification and then on the other hand they lose more money because they're being taxed. The incentives are not there.

They're turning off people from coming here, and they can't grow their industries. It doesn't work that way.

We have to pick our priorities, invest in them so that it helps every Newfoundlander and Labradorian, and there are ways of doing that. Proper consultation, setting your plan out, sticking to your plan, not flipping back and forth but make sure that the plan you do – I understand why you flip back and forth, because you didn't have a proper plan in the beginning, and that doesn't work. You can't plan that way to ensure you're going to govern properly and you're going to produce something that works for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

So, Mr. Chair, I'll have a chance to speak to this again.

Thank you

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: Oh, no, no. I couldn't believe what I just heard, Mr. Chair. I just couldn't believe.

This is a Member who was in the Cabinet of the previous government. The Member for Mount Pearl South stood in the House of Assembly last Monday – check Hansard – do you know what he said about Muskrat Falls? I was hoodwinked. I did not get the information. The words he used, I was hoodwinked.

So, Mr. Minister, when you were in the former government your colleague was saying you hoodwinked him. You know the largest levy we're going to have in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador is the rate increases when Muskrat Falls comes online.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: As the Member for St. John's Centre said the other day, rates are going to go up double. So anybody – \$150 is going to go up to \$300 unless we mitigate it, unless we do something with it, unless we mitigate it. And do you know something, \$150 a month is the

biggest levy that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians will ever see and you were a part of that decision. It is just absolutely ridiculous, Mr. Speaker, for him to get up on a high horse talking about how everything we're doing is bad when they look at a situation.

When his own colleague, who sat right there in that seat up there, Mr. Speaker, sat in that seat, stood in this House of Assembly and apologized to the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador for Muskrat Falls. He said my colleagues hoodwinked me, and he was a part of that Cabinet that hoodwinked him. That is just absolutely unbelievable.

Mr. Speaker, I'll ask you a question. If a colleague stood in that seat and said he was hoodwinked, how would the Opposition and the people of the province know what was happening with Muskrat Falls when they stood on their high horse and said \$6.2 billion, now it's up to \$11.9 billion. When their own –

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. JOYCE: Eleven-point-nine billion dollars. The largest levy, the largest tax we're going to hit with the lowest income of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians is because of that government when Muskrat Falls comes on.

We heard about the big Emera deal. Now they're going to get more profits from the line because of the cost overruns, the money – who made that deal? Stand up and apologize to the people of the province.

Mr. Speaker, I know they're picking on the minister. Libraries; let's get this now, and I spoke to the mayor. This is how this happened. We all remember because we were in Opposition, the CBS library. When they were up there, there was a big protest to move the CBS library. The CBS library, we're going to move it out, the big uproar.

Do you know what happened? Here is the mayor, he was in Kent store, Kent shopping, picked up the phone, here was Terry French, Clyde Jackman. Do you know what they did? B'y, we got a deal for you. What we're going to do for you, how about if we give you the money, put the library into the CBS building, and we'll

give you \$225,000 a year for rent for the library. That's how that deal was done, one library.

MR. BRAZIL: That's not how it works.

MR. JOYCE: The Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island saying that's not the way it works. Stand up and say it didn't work. Stand up and tell me how it worked. Here you go. If I'm saying something wrong here, stand up, stand up. Here you go, here's your opportunity. I'll sit down. I'll sit down right here and now. That's how they worked. And then you want to criticize about the library funds. Imagine a mayor in Kent, he was in Kent store, hardware store, said here's the deal we got for you – \$225,000 because we don't want people to complain. We'll help pay – how much rent on their new building? That will almost cover their share of the new building.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Twenty years.

MR. JOYCE: Twenty years, 25 years I think it was, a 25-year deal.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Mount Pearl pays a dollar.

MR. JOYCE: Mount Pearl pays a dollar. So that's the kind of stuff that we had to deal with.

Mr. Chair, I listened to some of the things he's saying about low-income people in the province. How about the \$74 million for low-income earners and seniors?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: Seventy-four million dollars, when you look at that, that's the largest investment in low-income people in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Chair.

I just want to go on to one thing. I don't want to say anything about the Member for Mount Pearl North. I have to admire your courage. For you to go on *Back Talk* and say: Yes, it was our fault because the civil service got too big, it bloated. It needs to be done. That takes courage.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: Now, we made debate how we have to do it, but I can tell you, for the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island to stand up and say, oh, we don't know what we're doing, and the former deputy premier of this province to go on *Back Talk* and say: Yes, it's our fault because we let this get out of hand. Now we're reeling it in.

The former deputy premier of the province, and then the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island stands up and says no. Why don't you just reach across to the former deputy premier and he'll tell you. He's apologizing to the people of the province for what happened, and that takes courage. I say to the former deputy premier, that takes courage.

Now, we can debate how we can do it, that's different, but we all agree there's a problem. Now, the Minister of Finance is the person who's helping with that problem. And I have to say, she's doing an admirable job with it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: I have to say, for anybody here to say to the Minister of Finance, oh, you went out and asked for a conciliator. There are seven bargaining units, you asked for a conciliator.

Did anybody ask her the question? Did the union ask for the conciliator for outstanding issues? That's the question they haven't asked. They did. The union of this – NAPE asked for a conciliator for outstanding issues.

So when you stand up and say to the Minister of Finance, oh, you're heavy handed. NAPE asked for a conciliator for outstanding issues for nine bargaining units – NAPE. So if you're going to make statements, you have to know what you're talking about here.

I say to the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island – and I know I only have a few minutes and I'll have lots more time. Do you know why I never take this Member seriously? It was 2015 when the tender was called for the Bay of Islands part of the tender. Mr. Chair, I pleaded with that minister; there was a piece of road in, they call it, Plant Hill in Summerside – he's over there laughing.

There was a piece of road, Plant Hill. There was \$500,000 in the Bay of Islands. Two days before the tender was called – information was proven when we got in – this Member took the \$500,000, put it out to Port au Port. I wrote the Member I think it was five times or four times, pleaded with him, that this part of the road which will take about \$50,000 to fix is dangerous. There were two accidents there that winter; never got a response.

So I say to the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island, when you say something, I know it's all politics. Safety is not your concern, for what you did to those people of the Bay of Islands. I can tell you that – you can laugh. You can laugh as much as you like but I can tell you, you showed your stripes when you wouldn't put those safety after having it in there, two days before – and I will say to the Member for Cape St. Francis, it is 100 per cent true. I begged, I begged to keep the money there. I begged to keep it there, and he wouldn't do it.

So that's why when the Member stands up and says stuff like that –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Chair, I just had to get that out for the people of the North Shore of the Bay of Islands.

Mr. Chair, I heard the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands talk the other day about the Premier. It is initiatives by the Premier but government don't deliver. Well, Mr. Chair, let me tell you one thing, look at the long-term care facility in Corner Brook, which was promised seven times –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: Seven times it was promised – seven times. And I know the Member for Mount Pearl North he understands it had to be done. Mount Pearl North, I got no problem with that.

Mr. Chair, guess what? Since 2007 the acute care hospital in Corner Brook, we're all out there, Mr. Chair, it was announced with

timelines and money attached to it for the acute care hospital in Corner Brook –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: So, Mr. Chair, when the Member for Mount Pearl North stands up and says Premier makes stuff but he don't follow through, look at the results that we have done.

AN HON. MEMBER: Southlands.

MR. JOYCE: Mount Pearl South; sorry.

Look at the results that we have. Mr. Chair, there was no prouder day for myself and the Member for Corner Brook, no prouder day when we announced the long-term care and the acute care hospital, and there was radiation included so those people with cancer now can have radiation, next to their families. They can have radiation at home, with families, to make it more comfortable. They don't have the travel cost.

Mr. Chair, for four or five years I heard on this side that you can't have radiation because it's unsafe to travel across the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. There will be radiation in Corner Brook. There was no prouder day for myself and the Member for Corner Brook and I thank the Minister of Health, the Minister of Transportation –

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: – and mainly the Premier of the province for following through on the commitment that was made.

CHAIR: Order, please!

I remind the hon. minister his speaking time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

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

It is indeed a privilege to get up here today and talk about Interim Supply, but first I'd like to

just make a couple of comments on what the minister just had to say. Minister, I stand in this House all the time and I'm sure all Members do with safety and residents foremost on all our minds, no matter if we're on this side of the House or on that side of the House.

This opportunity we get here today is to get up and say what we feel about what's on the go in our province and how everything is going. The minister mentioned about hoodwinked. Well, I can tell you one thing, the people that got hoodwinked in this province are the people of the province because they were promised something, they were promised that there was going to be a brighter tomorrow, and they promised that we had a plan and we're going to like it, and everyone can't see the plan.

I know there are Members over there, backbench Members, that after last year's budget were embarrassed to go to things in their districts; felt bad about going to things in their districts when they attacked the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Don't shake your heads, I know it. I spoke to residents in your area, couldn't believe it that they were – listen, we're talking about what is on the go for people in Newfoundland and Labrador; we're here to make sure that we make the right decisions.

You know, when I look at last year's budget and I look at what it did to the people of the province, it took away all their hope. It took away hope. Go to your coffee shops and talk to people; get out around and talk to people. I know you're listening to it too, just like we all are. The hope is gone out of what people really had in this province.

When you tax people to death and tax people and continue to tax, and attack people like what happened in last year's budget, it's just unfair. I talk to seniors every day that complain to me that my car insurance. I have a hard time paying my car insurance, because we're paying taxes on our car insurance. By the way, I think the only other province in Canada – but they have subsidies – is Saskatchewan that charges that tax.

Talk to seniors that have to go in now and pay for drugs over the counter that maybe to most people are not a lot of cost, and costs them \$20 or even \$5 a month. But when you're on a fixed income, you're a senior and you're trying to figure out where every cent is coming from, that's so difficult.

The comment was we got a plan and you're going to like it. Well, I'd say to you talk to the seniors in this province and see if they like your plan. Talk to them for the extra monies that they got to put out but they don't know where that money is coming from. Talk to them.

You made promises all through this election, no more taxes. The HST, we're taking it out. You cost the province \$120 million. If you had to leave that there, perhaps the seniors of the province wouldn't have to pay for over-the-counter drugs that's costing them \$20 or \$30 extra a month. The reason why you did that was because you had no plan in place.

I agree with the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island when he said – I saw it in my district; people did want a change. They said you guys have been in for a long while. We need somebody who's going to bring new life and it's going to be this and everything else, but boy, are they ever disappointed.

I've talked to constituents of mine, not very many down my way now that did vote Liberal, but anyway they'll never do it again they said.

AN HON. MEMBER: Five of them.

MR. K. PARSONS: No, more than five. There was a few more than that.

But it's the hope that people had, the hope that people need. There were lots of years in this province that people had a lot of hope.

Our young people, we have young people today who are in post-secondary education who are saying: What am I going to do? Where am I going to move? What am I doing to do because there's no plan in place? This government has absolutely no plan in place for the future of this province – absolutely no plan.

You look at the young people today who are our future. We always said they're the bright – our education system over the last number of years – I want to thank the Minister of Education, actually, for last week. He took me down to the new school opening in Torbay. I thank him for that. We had a great tour of the beautiful facility that's going to be down there.

Over the last number of years – people will look at this – we built so many schools in this province, it's unbelievable, but that's what we should do is invest in our young people. But your budget and your tax increases and everything else made us the worst place in Canada; one of the worst places in Canada to live now with taxes. Our young people can't afford to stay here. Housing starts are down. Young people are looking to say where can I go, because there's no plan in place for them to stay here.

Just look who you attacked in your last year's budget. You attacked our young people. You attacked our seniors, our middle-income people, people that live from day to day.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. K. PARSONS: They're laughing over there now. I really think it's pretty funny that the minister of business is laughing over there now when we're talking about something as serious as seniors and stuff like that. You can find it as funny as you want, but it's important that we in here do the right thing for the people of our province.

You look at a book tax – seriously, a book tax; the only province in Canada that can come up with a book tax. Who are we attacking there? Our young people who can go and buy a book. We're attacking our small businesses. We're attacking publishers.

MS. PERRY: Our writers.

MR. K. PARSONS: Our writers. Look who we attacked by a business tax. Our libraries – I mean, I have a library in Pouch Cove that I believe is 40 years old, and they offer different programs. The town council of Pouch Cove

wanted the library to stay open for an extra period of time. So they decided in their budget to put money into their library because they saw the benefit of it. They saw the benefit that there's a – I think it's called Mother Goose program that's offered down there where the children come in, pre-school children come in and the parents read to them and it's a big nice program.

The town paid for that to stay open, because they realize the importance of it. But what did this government want to do? Close the whole library. Close it down. I mean, people were using it. Our seniors were going there to do different things on the Internet, using the computers to – I think they have seven computers down there. The librarian told me it is booked solid all the time. And that's what we're closing; that's who we're attacking. Think about it. Think about what you've done.

I'm hoping that this budget coming up now, there's going to be some big changes made. I'm hoping you're going to re-think like you've done most things. Like closing health care facilities, I think you revisited most of them. The ones you introduced that you were closing and realized that we can't attack rural Newfoundland like that. That's not fair to do these things.

The gas tax itself, what that's done to our economy. I'd like to know what it's done to small businesses in our economy. What has it done? The Conference Board of Canada came out last week and said we're in dire straits because of what your government did.

The tax increases, the attack on people in this province. I mean you can laugh and joke all you want, but the people of this province are really hurting. And they're hurting because they don't have the money to pay for what you want them to pay for. I talked to a lot of residents in this province who said, we understand the fiscal situation we're in but it's too much, too hard, too fast. And it's attacking on the wrong people.

There were so many promises made in the last election and the biggest word that I hear out in the public is trust. We can't trust them. They say one thing and they do something else. And that's important, because as parliamentarians and people in here, we should have the trust of the

people. I hope I have the trust of the people in Cape St. Francis that I'm going to do the best for them. Because I know I will, and I'll try my best. But people don't have trust in this government because, you see, this government had no plan. They had absolutely no plan. Came in, gave us a budget, and then all of a sudden: oh, my God. Okay, let's go revisit this; let's go revisit this again.

You've got an opportunity now with a budget coming in now the next time; hopefully there'll be a bit of a plan in this budget, because there was absolutely no plan and no trust, and no nothing in last year's budget.

Mr. Chair, I spoke to a few of the civil servants over in different departments, and friends of mine that are around government, and they've never seen the turmoil that's there now. It's sad when you see families that are just in such disarray, they don't know what's happening. We got directors over there now, one job, and there are four directors in that department competing for the one job.

Again, no plan in how people – I wonder sometimes, do you really care about the people of this province? Do you really care how they are?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. K. PARSONS: No, but what you do to families, what you do to families in this province. Those people that are going to be out of a job, gone, we don't care. There are ways of doing things; there are ways of doing things better.

We have a lot of public servants –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

MR. K. PARSONS: Mr. Chair, people in our province deserve better than what they're giving them. They deserve better. They deserve to be treated – you mentioned the word respect to other Members, let's respect all the members of

the people of the province. They deserve better, and we deserve to have a government that has a plan in place to make their lives better.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

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

I'm very happy to rise and speak, particularly in response to the Member from –

AN HON. MEMBER: It's committee.

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Chair, I am very happy to stand and speak to this Interim Supply, particularly after the Member for Humber – Bay of Islands, who is also the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment, when he accused me of fear mongering. When he stood up and spoke because he said I said –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

The Chair is having an awful difficulty trying to hear the hon. Member speak. I ask for, again, respect from all Members of the Chamber.

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

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

As we know, it was actually the Premier who a few days ago in this House said that the electricity rates, the power rates for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador will double. He said that. That's quite alarming, and we all knew that was coming, Mr. Chair, and that's going to affect individual households, it's going to affect businesses, it's going to affect institutions.

Does it mean, in fact, that the Health Sciences Centre – their power bill will double, and who's going to pay for that? Well, I guess we're going to have to pay for it out of government coffers.

And where does the money for government coffers come? It comes out of the pockets of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

What happens when a bakery, an individual business, when their power rates double? That will be passed on to the consumer. It's a serious problem; it's a real serious problem.

When this government first took office in December of 2015, they had the opportunity to do a thorough, public stop-and-go analysis of Muskrat Falls. And that wasn't done, Mr. Chair. Unless it was and they're not going to table what was done because we've asked for that. We've asked for what was the stop-and-go analysis done. Was it possible to stop Muskrat Falls? We still don't know that. We don't know what that is.

What are the ramifications of people's power bills doubling? Well, if your power bill is \$300 during the month of January that means when it doubles it will become \$600. For many working families that is an incredible, incredible financial burden. Particularly in this economy, because what we've seen is that people are hurting.

Our working-class families are hurting. They're paying mortgage payments; they're paying for child care if they have children under the age of five. Child care is a minimum, a minimum of \$800 a month per child – a minimum. You're lucky if you get it for \$800 a month. Without affordable, accessible, public child care system we are keeping, particularly low-income working families, in poverty.

I can't tell you how many women I have spoken to who have said I had to quit, or I couldn't go back to my work because I can't afford child care. What does that mean? That takes people out of the economic – out of the workforce, out of the economy. And that's a burden on individual families. It's also not fair, and it's predominantly – we know it's predominantly women who are still responsible for arranging for child care for children.

We also know, Mr. Chair, the unemployment rate in Newfoundland and Labrador is the highest in the country, at 16 per cent. And government in its *The Way Forward* or way backwards document said that it's going to grow

to 20 per cent. It's kind of a way backwards rather than a way forward.

We don't know what they're going to do to mitigate that because we haven't seen a plan to increase economic opportunities and employment opportunities for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We have not seen a concrete job strategy. And we know that in fact what's happening is government is creating even more unemployment in the job cuts that we have just seen, and in the ones that are being foreshadowed. So what we have, in fact, is even more of a growing unemployment situation.

So government in and of itself is creating more unemployment. What should government be doing during this time of economic hardship? Government's role is to strengthen our communities and to strengthen our people because we will get through this. We've seen hard economic times before and we will get through this.

We will see resurgence in some of our natural resources and extraction industries. We know that is coming and there are other things that government can do. But, in fact, what this government has done is creating further casualties. They are creating further casualties by cutting jobs, and we see it in all of our communities. We see what is happening to families. Right now, government has created the reality show *Survivor* where public sector workers are told that they're going to have to compete with one another for the jobs that will exist, that will stay.

It's almost like a gladiator cage where you put all the gladiators in one cage, then they have to fight and the fittest survive. This has created such an incredibly difficult time for the public sector workers of our province. And it didn't have to be this way, Mr. Chair. That is the hardest thing; it didn't have to be this way.

Now, the other day in the media we heard about the rise in bankruptcies in Newfoundland and Labrador. There has been a 3.6 per cent increase in the number of bankruptcies in the province, individual bankruptcies, in 2016 over 2015. The alarming statistic that we see as well is 158 per cent increase – 158 per cent increase – in the proposals for protection. Meaning these are

people who are desperately – 158 per cent more in 2016 over 2015, people who are desperately trying to hold on and not have to declare bankruptcy; 158 per cent increase in one year. And I suspect we're going to see even more than that this year because of government layoffs; also public sector layoffs have a rollout effect in the private sector as well.

So these are people who are just able to pay the minimum on their credit cards, who are just able to put clothing on their children and feed their children. Nancy Snedden, who was the economic advisor from BDO, said there are always people who are living pay cheque to pay cheque. And with the cost of living increases in Newfoundland and Labrador, the increased GST, the increase in insurance tax, the gas tax and all those things are cutting back on their available cash flow and making it harder and harder to pay their minimum payments.

Mr. Chair, this doesn't even include people who really have nothing to lose. This doesn't include people who don't even have anything so that they would need to declare bankruptcy. These are the working people of our province, the hard-working people of our province on whose back our economy grows.

We know that there is an increase in the use in the food banks. So what this government has done has abandoned the people rather than strengthening our people, strengthening our economy to say we're going to get through this hard time together.

Premier Notley – we all know that Alberta is a little bit different. We know that they didn't have the same great debt load. We know that. But what did she do? She said: We believe in the people of Alberta. We believe in our public service. We will work our way out together. That's not what this government did. This government said the bottom is out of her. The arse is out of her. We're going to have to lay off people. We're just going to have to cut and cut and cut.

Never once did they say that we are going to work our way out together. Notley, once again, said: We are going to stand by Albertans in the tough times. That's what this government needs to do. That's what governments are elected to

do: to stand by their people, to stand by the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, strengthen our community, strengthen our individuals so we can weather this storm, not chip away at the very little that people are holding on to right now.

People are so afraid and this government has created that climate of fear. Not us here on this side of the House; they have created that climate of fear. They have created that climate of despair and all of us are hearing about people leaving.

Mr. Chair, I'm looking forward to standing up again and talking about some of the very specific –

CHAIR: Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: – concrete steps that government has taken.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Order, please!

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

The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Service NL.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. TRIMPER: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

And by the way, Happy Birthday, Sir –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. TRIMPER: You're now officially, by the calendar, one year older than I am. Anyway, I hope you're enjoying your morning and before I go into my remarks and throw my speech out, I did want to also recognize International Women's Day.

I spent 14 years working in Russia and we always made sure we were there on the 8th of March. It's Dobreagh Meshdunaroadni Shenski Din and it's a huge event in Russia, as it is in many parts of Europe. It wasn't until many years later, I started to even hear about it in Canada,

but in Russia it's big event. The women are feted all day long. They dress up. The men do all the chores. They are treated like they need to be treated, like very important parts of our society. So anyway, to take a nod from Russia.

Mr. Chair, I was going to talk about this morning, Service NL, this great new department that I have. I was going to speak about spending in my district because that's what I believe one does in an Interim Supply bill, at least it's what I've come to experience, but I've noticed the tone has changed a lot this morning and it's one of a blame game. Why are we moving so quickly? What are you doing to us? You're sending despair across the province.

Well, I think it's very important to go back and reflect on just what has gone on in the last 15 months or so. I know myself, amongst my colleagues and friends and in the media, I've often spoke about: I have looked forward to every single day in this new adventure of politics with zeal. That is with the exception of a lot of days recently and last year's budget.

No one's having fun. I look down at the Minister of Transportation and Works and we like to say we were separated at birth through some kind of similarly, but he made an interesting comment last year. I remember in this debate one year ago, when we were dealing with Interim Supply, he said: Do you think anyone's having fun here? Do you think anyone on this side of the House who's faced with these tough decisions is really enjoying themselves, increasing fees, increasing taxes, cutting spending? Is this something that a politician wants to do who's really trying to make a difference in society? I'd say absolutely not.

It's become – let me just put it another way. I wonder what it must have been like to have had a finance minister come to Cabinet and tell the various departments, the various ministers, guess what? You can increase your budget some 10 per cent this year. You need to get back to me and tell me how you're going to do that.

When, in fact, all I've experienced is – and thank God, I have an excellent person who understands finance. I can recall a quote that many of us recall from a previous administration when the finance minister indicated that he

wasn't very good at math. Well, thank goodness we have somebody who frankly understands financial management, understands the situation we're in and, unfortunately, the need to act, as we've had to act. Again, no one is enjoying this.

I just heard one of the Members say: Why are we moving so quickly? Why are we doing this? You're putting too much pressure us. I like to reflect back on a particular morning I had at Beachy Cove Elementary last spring. It was Environment Week. I've spoken about this in the House before, but I think it's time to remind everyone of this kind of experience and this kind of, sort of, light bulb that goes on. I'm in a classroom, it's Environment Week, and in come the environmental agents at Beachy Cove Elementary. These kids are in grades four to six and their full of promise. They had these little vests on; they're the environmental agents of the school. They were so proud.

I look at those kids and I think about the fact that had we not started to move, as we did last year, with a situation when our per-capita debt – we are now in the vicinity of some \$23,000-\$26,000 per man, woman and child in this province right now. I look at those kids, and I think by the time, say, seven to 10 years from now when they start paying taxes and they have to realize that had we not started to move, had we not started to go on a fiscal plan which by 2022-2023 we will be at surplus, those kids would have been burdened with some \$56,000-\$53,000 per capita.

Their ability to realize their dreams, their ability to go on and be successful in this province, frankly, were, forget it, you're not going to get there. Maybe you would end up having to go to a place like Alberta, where you've got a AAA credit rating versus where we're sitting right now, which is just a notch above what one would refer to as a government-junk-bond status.

We are in a heck of a state, and it's important that we do something now that we don't – there's no way that we, as this generation, should be punting this out to the future generations. Where's our responsibility? We've got to take some accountability for the mess that we're in. I don't get personal with my comments back and forth. I feel that former administrations were focused on other targets, they totally

missed this financial situation, let's just give the population what they need, and now we're at the point where we've got to take these strong actions. We're willing to do that, Mr. Chair. But, as I say, we have many days where I can now say I don't enjoy coming to work because I see the reality of it, and it's tough.

I also think I'm going to talk a little bit about Service NL, because the reason why I am now the Minister of Service NL is that this government had to make some tough decisions. Let me tell you, I have aged a little bit the last couple of weeks because I could never have dreamed in my wildest dreams that I would have been the Minister of Environment. It's been a great honour and I work with a great team, but with the realization that we had to find efficiencies, that we had to find a model where we can bring departments and units together, the painful part of this has, I got to tell you, I certainly aged a couple of weeks ago, and I'm still dealing with it as recent as a couple of hours ago. Still hearing from staff who are affected by these tough decisions. We've had to do it; we've had to go to this Flatter, Leaner Management Structure.

So in moving Environment around as we have, we've had to find efficiencies. Now, I'm always a glass-half-full kind of guy and certainly in terms of the responsibilities of government and the environment, that is still there. I still retain the responsibility around climate change and energy efficiency; but, unfortunately, we've had to move other units of that former department into the capable administrations of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment, the Minister responsible for – what do you call your department now?

AN HON. MEMBER: Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation.

MR. TRIMPER: Yes, TCII. And then of course –

AN HON. MEMBER: What's in a name, anyway?

MR. TRIMPER: What's in a name?

And the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources. The good news again is that these

responsibilities are still being addressed and we will certainly make sure that we make progress on them. But these are horrifically, painful decisions. Again, I can just imagine what it must be like to be able to say you have more money in your budget this year, Minister; how would you like to spend it? I just can't even imagine what that must be like.

Another way to think about the situation we're in, as we look at the two primary departments in terms of providing services in the province, are Health and Community Services and Education. Well, guess what's actually number two in terms of spending? It's financing, servicing this massive debt. So some 11 per cent, 11 cents out of every dollar that we have to spend goes into this world. I can just imagine if I could have those 11 cents to use around the departments that I've been responsible for and go forward, what could you get done? I only hope I'm in this game long enough to see what it might be like to enjoy an increased spending atmosphere and to be able to go and pursue other opportunities.

It's time to step up. We're willing to do it. Again, I thank the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board; what a tough job she has. I know she's interacting with each of us around the Cabinet table, with each of the caucus and probably everybody in the House as she has to deliver the bad news, and we have to find a way to find these solutions.

Again, no one is having fun. I look forward to, hopefully, having a chance to get back on my feet, maybe we can talk about some of the good things that Service NL is doing, some of the other departments I'm responsible for, some of the good things we've managed to do in my District of Lake Melville.

A lot of what we're doing frankly is shifting attitudes, trying to provide an atmosphere and an environment that will enhance and encourage investment. I think ultimately when you look at the bond-rating agencies and what they're saying to us is you, Newfoundland and Labrador, need to act. And that is where we have to start. As I say, it's number two in terms of our spending.

So we are willing to act. It's not any fun, but I look forward to those days when we can stand

here and talk about new spending, new ideas and new ways to run and provide a future for those kids in Beachy Cove Elementary who, frankly, deserve a prosperous and bright future.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Harbour Grace – Port de Grave.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

It certainly is always an honour to stand here and represent our districts of course; I represent the District of Harbour Grace – Port de Grave and, today, I also want to acknowledge International Women's Day. We know that we have a lot of young women from our province of course who just participated in Daughter of the Vote just recently here in the Confederation Building and they're in Ottawa today with the prime minister. I'm proud to say that one of my own constituents, young constituents – she's certainly displaying some great leadership skills – Ms. Rebecca French of Bay Roberts is in Ottawa today.

It is an honour to stand and speak now to Interim Supply, and I can't help but reflect on some of the comments made by our hon. colleagues across the way. I will say this, for the record: I think each one of them are fine people, on a personal basis, but how deceiving to stand in this hon. House and to not take any responsibility and to play ignorance to the horrible decisions that have to be made here now, given our fiscal reality.

It's a farce to listen, and to listen how they claim ignorance and not knowing – hello? The reason why the province finds itself where it is, it's because of the mismanagement of funds for the past decade. Where were your decisions? Where were your thinking hats when we had \$25 billion? And to ask about seniors now – we all care about seniors, and young people.

We want our young people to be retained here in the province, and we have amazing educational facilities and post-secondary facilities and

training programs here to keep our young people here, but where were your thoughts and where were your decisions during that time when we had an abundance of funds that were in the province at that time –

MR. P. DAVIS: A point of order.

CHAIR: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Topsail – Paradise, on a point of order.

MR. P. DAVIS: Mr. Chair, I'm very hesitant to interrupt the Member opposite; I don't like to do that.

AN HON. MEMBER: State your Standing Order.

MR. P. DAVIS: I thought I had the floor, Mr. Chair. I don't like to do that, but I feel it's important to bring a matter to the Chair's attention under Standing Order 49 regarding offensive language. The Member opposite just accused Members on this side of the House of deceiving, deception. I believe that's unparliamentary for her to do so. We've heard these things in the House over recent days since we came in our most recent sitting, and we've let it go.

But, Mr. Chair, I think it's important that we maintain the decorum, proper language and proper conduct in the House. I apologize for interrupting, but I think it's important to bring this forward and I ask that you rule on it.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: I don't believe, Mr. Chair, there's been absolutely anything said by the Member behind me that would constitute a point of order under Standing Order 49. In fact, I think there has been a lot of stuff said on the other side that might be considered a standing order breach.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair will take it under advisement and report back.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Again, I want to remind the people at home, and of course the people here in our hon. Chamber, of Bill 29. We talk about not being transparent and whatnot, but Bill 29, there was a lot of legislation that was smuggled –and I use the word smuggled – in under Bill 29, such as Muskrat Falls. I've often questioned, does this province even need that project in the very first place? Just to put that out there for our thoughts and for our viewers at home, and for all hon. Members here in this House.

Having said that now, Mr. Chair, on a lighter note, I also want to promote the Town of Bay Roberts. As I mentioned recently here in the House, Bay Roberts has made the top 10 finalists for the Kraft Hockeyville 2017. Of course, this is quite the accomplishment to get to this level, to make the top 10 among all the communities chosen across our great country. Of course, we're calling on Newfoundlanders and Labradorians home and abroad to certainly come and support Bay Roberts this Sunday, March 12 to March 13. The voting is online and all those details can be found on the Kraft Hockeyville site.

I also want to throw a bouquet out to the team at Powell's Supermarket in Bay Roberts, and, of course, residents in the town and town staff in Bay Roberts for making it happen. They've raised a lot of awareness and promotion around this event.

The Bay Arena, which is a 30-plus-year-old building, it's a centerpiece in the community, and the region for that matter. It certainly brings residents together. The doors open there at 6 o'clock every morning. It's quite the busy building.

Certainly, Bay Roberts and the Bay Arena, and all our residents who utilize that facility are certainly deserving of Kraft Hockeyville. So I ask everybody here across our great province, and as I said Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and even family members and fans of our

province across our country, you have to tune in and vote on Sunday and Monday, March 12 and 13.

Also, it's a great opportunity to talk about things that are happening in the District of Harbour Grace – Port de Grave. As we know, we had to make a lot of tough decisions of course, but a concern that citizens have come to me about, and a lot of my residents, are the children that are on the highway, and I just want to talk about that. We do have speed radar signs that are now in place on the Conception Bay highway in Harbour Grace, in the school zone there, and that speed limit has been reduced now to 30 kilometres per hour. So I just want to make note of that of course.

Also, we talk about the tough decisions that have to be made. Absolutely, tough decisions have to be made and it is heart wrenching. I will make no hesitation in saying that, and I hear that on a regular basis in my constituency office. It is, but having said that, please, with all due respect, take responsibility for those who were in charge of making decisions at that time and who were in leadership roles.

A very, very big topic in my district, of course, was a project that money was announced for several times in several budgets, and that is of course the topic of Coley's Point Primary School. We have a building, a school, 60-year plus. This building should have been replaced a decade ago.

I remember as far back as when the hon. Member Roland Butler was the MHA for the Port de Grave District at the time. It was something he lobbied for, and it even goes back farther than that. Educators in the area, principals who once principled that school, Ms. Joy Brown, was vocal about this just recently at the task force, the Premier's task force on education. So this is something that has been looked over.

We hear the great news about the schools opening their doors around the province. The Member for Cape St. Francis just mentioned the school in his district, and that's wonderful. How wonderful that must be. I ask again, where were the decisions, where was the priority, where was

the consideration for Coley's Point Primary at that time? It's still an issue today.

As we know, we're in a horrible, fiscal, financial situation, arguably the worst our province has ever seen. But, please, don't mislead the public. Any hon. Member here in this House on any side, be honest, let's stand up and take responsibility and let's not act in ignorance because certainly we're left with what we're left with. And as the old saying goes, you can't get blood from a turnip. Well, that's pretty much what we're working with here today, Mr. Chair.

Also, now I want to acknowledge the firefighters for the Town of Bay of Roberts. Just recently I attended their firefighter's ball. They were celebrating 74 years. These brave volunteers provide fire and emergency services to communities such as Port de Grave, Bareneed, Coley's Point, Country Road, Bay Roberts, Shearstown, Butlerville, and, of course, they came together for their annual ball.

Also, I want to say a big thank you to firefighters across Conception Bay North because when someone falls on challenging times, everybody tends to step up in our region, in Conception Bay North and the District of Harbour Grace – Port de Grave.

As we know, the Town of Spaniard's Bay – Tilton face some challenging times with regard to their fire services. Although they remain dedicated to the cause, neighbouring fire stations, such as Upper Island Cove, Harbour Grace and Bay Roberts stepped in and reassured residents that fire and emergency services certainly will be front and center and those residents wouldn't be neglected; although there was some challenging times happening in the Town of Spaniard's Bay – Tilton. So I want to thank those firefighters for their leadership in that.

There are always lots of good things happening, though, in the District of Harbour Grace – Port de Grave. I want to talk about the Goodwill Seniors Club of Spaniard's Bay. Recently I was able to secure some funding for them and this is under the grants of the Healthy Living and recreation Fund. Again, I want to say kudos to those residents for doing all they can for

practicing healthy living and recreation, and to keep that going in our communities.

Also, Harbour Grace as well; I was able to secure some funding for them for their recreation and whatnot, for their walking trails. They're constructing – it's going to be a really renowned walking trail down there.

Also Spaniard's Bay, for the rec centre in Spaniard's Bay. I'm happy to say just under \$20,000 was secured for that community for healthy living and recreation to make upgrades for accessibility for that rec centre.

Mr. Chair, certainly it is, we all stand here and I think we all stand here with heavy hearts when we talk about the decisions that have to be made, and they're tough. I hear about them on a regular basis but again, I encourage all hon. Members in this House, take responsibility for the faith and the trust that has been placed on each and every one of us.

Not just for the Official Opposition but also for the Third Party, we want to hear them take their responsibility as well. To keep accountable for the criticisms they have made prior to this administrations taking government and whatnot because we all are here, every one of us were elected to represent our citizens, our seniors, our young people, our middle class, our lower class, our upper class, everybody in Newfoundland and Labrador. So let's not get here and make wastage of time in this hon. House because it certainly is an honour to be here.

When given the opportunity to speak and to ask questions, let's ask some constructive questions. Let's put the topics on the table that are important to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians as opposed to petty politics and drama. Because if people want that, Mr. Chair, we've got daytime soap operas, such as *Days of Our Lives*, we got *The Young and The Restless*, we got it all.

So let's make use of our time here in this Legislature, because it is certainly an honour to be here and it's not to be taken lightly. It's not to be taken for granted. We put ourselves forward; we put our names on ballots for that and the people in our great province, they make their

way out to those polls. It's a challenge for some people to even get out –

CHAIR: Order, please!

MS. P. PARSONS: Some people who are not even mobile.

CHAIR: Order, please!

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

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Topsail – Paradise.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Before I begin my remarks, I'd like to acknowledge and offer my sincere acknowledgement of International Women's Day.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. P. DAVIS: I think it's an important day to acknowledge and discuss. It started very bright and early for me this morning, having a discussion about International Women's Day. Not only important women in my life, but as I was home this morning getting ready to go to work and doing the things you do in the morning, my wife and I were discussing it, and she talked about the important women in her life as well. So it's important for all of us to have those discussions I think and to highlight that today. I'm glad to have a couple of seconds this morning to acknowledge that. I'm sure there will be other discussion on that as the day goes on.

We're here this morning and at this point in time debating, in Committee, Interim Supply which gives the government finances to do the work of government and to run the private affairs of the province until the budget is passed and all of the funds are properly approved and processed through the budget process.

We're in a very interesting time as a province. There are significant challenges, many Members have said, but it's also interesting, I think, to look back in the past because Members opposite have made so pretty significant comments this morning and over the last number of weeks and months.

I know the Premier is on record as saying he didn't know what the finances of the province were and the minister didn't know. They didn't know what the finances were; but the reality of it is, in 2015, we brought forward a budget that was seen by many as an austerity budget, reducing expenditures, a plan to increase taxation, a plan to curb the expenses of government while running a significant deficit. Everyone in the province knew that. Everyone in the province knew that.

Also, depending on what happened with oil prices, production and exchange rate are the three key factors – the exchange rate of the dollar, the production of oil, which suffered tremendously – in '14 and '15 there were great challenges in production – and also the value of oil and sales of oil were going to impact our budget even more so. If production went up and the value of oil increased, the deficit would lessen. If the other happened, which it did, if oil continued to fall and not recover, as had been predicted by most, then the deficit could be impacted as well.

Then the premier talks about: Oh, well, I asked for an update. A smart political move, I'll give him credit for it, on his part. A smart political move on his part to ask for the update when we knew that the decisions of OPEC, at any time, especially in the fall of 2015, which is time period we're talking about, were going to be significant to the finances of the province and he looked for that before OPEC.

OPEC met just after the election. He was looking for that before the election. And, of course, I wasn't prepared to provide a look into the crystal ball and try and make a decision on what OPEC was going to do and how it was going to influence expenditures and the economy and the province's financial circumstances. I wasn't prepared to do that, knowing that OPEC had a significant potential for impact. Then the Premier says, oh, I

wouldn't tell him; I just wouldn't say. It's easy for them to say.

What's really interesting is that since that time, there's so much that they won't tell us. So they call us out, make accusations against us as a government – and that's what happens. And now we're over here in Opposition, we ask questions on a regular basis, and every day we come here to the House we ask questions and we struggle to get information. We struggle to get answers from government.

When they campaigned on so many things, they campaigned on openness and transparency. You look at the biggest project in the province today with Nalcor, Muskrat Falls, a lot of discussion continuing on – interesting discussions yesterday and tidbits of information thrown out, kind of willy-nilly thrown out yesterday on the project, big project. There was a lot of discussion about back in the day when we were there, that increased oversight was a necessity – understanding, openness, transparency. Well, there hasn't been an oversight committee report released since December 2015 – same month they took power. There has not been one, whether it would have been regular reports.

They promised an EY report in March – I know this is March, but it was March last year they promised an EY report. We still haven't seen it. If we go through the history of this relatively new government based on criticisms they did of us as a government before, based on the promises they made before the election and based on the decisions and actions they've taken since December 2015, the last 15, 16 months now, we should never wonder or question why people have lost faith and trust in this government.

That's the bottom line, they don't trust. I hear it every single day. I hear it from their constituents, I hear it from our constituents and I hear it in many different forms every day: You cannot trust this government. And there's good reason for people to feel that way.

They campaigned on – for two years before the election the Premier was at a dinner one day and he told people: We have a plan, and you're going to like it. That's what he said: We have a plan, and you're going to like it. Well, 15, 16

months later we still haven't the plan. We saw *The Way Forward* document – it was a document; it was a vision document. It wasn't really a plan, but it was a vision document.

They had *The Way Forward* which was going to be a plan, going to create a plan. We never saw that. We had captains of industry tour the province – one of those captains of industry is a minister in the government over there today, tour the province. We're going to talk to stakeholders and businesses. We're going to create that plan and share that plan.

They had a plan and they said not only do we have a plan; you're going to like it. For two years before the election they were telling people and people were saying oh, thank goodness, we've got a new group coming, they're going to have so much new energy, they're going to manage better, they're going to govern better, they've got all these wonderful ways, no job losses, not on my watch – I think they all tweeted that out and used those graphics – no tax increases.

Tax increases were a job killer; that's what the current Minister of Finance said. She said it was job killer. She sat over here in the House and when we talked about increasing taxes, she tore strips off us as a government, tore strips off us, day after day, telling us how bad we were and what poor managers we were because we proposed tax increases going into an election. That's going to really help you get elected, isn't it, telling people we are going to increase taxes going into an election?

In 2013, I think it was about 600 job reductions we made in the public service and Members over there that sat over here tore strips off us. Actually, that's the number that Opposition at the time started to inflate because one day they came in and they said oh, you laid off 550 and a week later oh, it was 650. Then it became 800. Then it became 1,500 and then it became 2,000. I think they went all the way to actually 2,500, saying oh, look they laid off 2,500. The worst thing you could ever do as a government is reduce the size of the public service. It's going to hammer the economy; no respect for public servants because we were laying off public servants. That's what your Opposition said when

we were in government, and, even further than that, campaigned on: not on my watch.

Now, when I grew up and if my father said to me you're going to use words like "not on my watch," I mean that's giving someone your word. What that means is no matter what happens, no matter what, that will not happen. I will not let that happen as long as I'm in control of it. That's what that means. It will not happen. What my father always told me was, and taught me, what I was taught when I grew up that if you give someone your word like that and say as long as I'm here, I'm not going to do it, and then you do it, then you should no longer be here. That's what that means. Well, I'm not going to stay here, on my watch, and do it. That's a commitment – that's a significant commitment.

No tax increases – job killer was the one that was used regularly. Tax increases are a job killer. Do you know what tax increase we're talking about? We're talking about a 2 per cent tax increase on HST, because that's what we had planned.

A job killer; Members opposite, who sat here in the Opposition at the time when we were in government, day after day after day hammered us on that. Where are we today? And we don't know what's coming.

Public servants are being dealt with in a way that's not seen as respectful. They're politicizing the public service. We don't know what's coming in the budget, and that's pretty standard, but I can tell you there are a lot of people that are very worried about it.

My time for this session, this part has come to an end. I've got two bullets covered so far, and I have a lot more that we're going to talk about and that we're going to highlight as we talk about this part of the budget.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's a pleasure for me to speak this morning on the Supply bill. I too would like to recognize International Women's Day, and certainly women have been very important in my life, including my mom, my mother-in-law, of course my wife and my two daughters, and my two daughters-in-law, the very, very important women in my life. I certainly want to recognize them today and the significant contribution they're making, have made to our province and continue to make.

Mr. Chair, sometimes we sit here and sometimes it's hard to contain your emotions when you hear such – I don't know how to term it – such rhetoric that you get on a daily basis when we talk about certain issues. Mr. Chair, I've been listening to some of the hon. Members opposite, and one of the hon. Members said this morning that people should be in an uproar in this province – absolutely, should be in an uproar. They should have been in an uproar after the condition of this province we were left with after the administration that was there went out of office. That, in itself, was a disaster. It's a disaster we had been left with that we are trying to come to grips with.

Mr. Chair, the former premier made mention of the fact that they did a budget last year and it was – in 2015, although they did the budget with a \$1.1 billion dollar deficit. Then, of course, the Member said, well, the Premier was asking for information in September. As a matter of fact, I think it was probably September 26, which was not very far away from when OPEC was going to bring their numbers down.

To say that he did not have that information, Mr. Chair, is somewhat disingenuous because of the fact that he could have done his math on that. If it was \$1.1 billion, and by the time we took office in December it had ballooned to \$2.8 billion, who could have – talk about a plan, who could have ever planned so inadequately to be able to come up with those numbers? Mr. Chair, it's absolutely shameful, shameful that that type of rhetoric is put here.

Mr. Chair, they talk about we had no plan. We had no plan? I'm not too sure they know a meaning of a plan on the opposite side.

Mr. Chair, last year my hon. colleague from St. George's – Humber got up and put in a private Member's bill that if we were ever in a surplus position again, we would be putting away some funds for what we would consider to be a rainy day or a day when we would be in a less than desirable position. Mr. Chair, I rose last year because of the fact that while my hon. Member was bringing in his private Member's bill, Members on the opposite were laughing because they did not have a vision or could not even think about the fact that we would ever be in surplus again. Our Finance Minister, Mr. Chair, we are planning to be in that position.

If you want to talk about a plan – \$25 billion in royalties in 10 years, and I think I alluded to that last year, Mr. Chair. If they had a plan or if they had a vision, just a small portion of a vision of having all of these royalties come in, if they had only taken 4 per cent, not 10 per cent, not 8 per cent. If they had only taken 4 per cent of those royalties and put it aside – I have 1,500 requests for roadwork, it is a billion dollars. Guess what, Mr. Chair? Four per cent would have provided enough funding to do every request in this province in roadwork.

Now, that's what I talk about a plan or a vision. When they talk about not having that, they did not have a plan. They probably didn't even know what a plan was all about. They were very, very famous, Mr. Chair, of making announcements and announcements and announcements and announcements. As a matter of fact, the former Member in my district before I won the election, I know there was one announcement made three times on the same announcement. I got tired of going through the announcements. Work is still not done and wasn't done.

So, Mr. Chair, when we talk about that, and we talk about plans, I get somewhat upset when I hear this sort of rhetoric that's on and that's put forward. Mr. Chair, the same scenario, the announcement – I'll just take the Corner Brook Hospital, for example. The Corner Brook Hospital was announced – I don't know how many times it was announced. The hon. Member could probably tell me, but it was announced over and over –

MR. JOYCE: Six.

MR. HAWKINS: Six times. Over and over and over again and there was never a shovel put in the ground, in spite of the fact, Mr. Chair, they were flush with money. There was \$25 billion in royalties in a 10-year period, and nothing was ever done.

What have we done? We're implementing a plan. We have a plan. We have a plan for long-term care in Western Newfoundland. We have a plan for long-term care in Central Newfoundland. These announcements will be happening and will be coming. Not only will the announcements be coming, Mr. Chair, but we are going to put those announcements in action. We're going to get that done. We're looking at different –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HAWKINS: We're going to deliver. We're going to have the results. We're looking at different models of doing things.

You want to talk about a plan, Mr. Chair. We have a plan, not only for one year of roadwork; we have a plan for five years of roadwork.

AN HON. MEMBER: How many?

MR. HAWKINS: Five years. They have never understood this because they've never had this in the past. As a matter of fact, the people of the province never had it in the past, and we are putting a plan in place whereby we can plan appropriately. We can plan – not on politics, not on politics. We can plan on evidence in which we are going to be looking at doing things differently.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Chair, to be prudent and to be responsible, to be fiscally responsible and to do the right thing, you don't put tenders out in August month of an election year for roadwork expecting, in Newfoundland and Labrador, to have the work completed in the season. It's not happening, Mr. Chair, it's not happening.

So as a result of that, this will not happen. And this year we will have our tenders out. We had a block of tenders out in January. We had our second block of tenders out in the middle of February. Our third block of tenders will be out

in the middle of March. Every one of our tenders will be out before the end of March.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HAWKINS: Mr. Chair, that is planning. That is knowing what you're going to do. That is taking the initiative to get out there to make sure that our construction industry, the civil association, we work in partnership, we collaborate with people, we understand what the industry is looking for and we're putting in a lot of measures, new, innovative ways in which we can do the work that we're supposed to be doing.

That, Mr. Chair, is just one example, and I can go on and on and on with regard to what we're doing within our department. Very shortly, we will also have a five-year plan for marine. Again, that's another area that's been sorely neglected over the years when it comes to our terminals and the facilities. Tourists come to our province, they have an opportunity to go in and one of the first things they see is deplorable conditions that exist in some of our terminals. So we're putting in a five-year plan to address some of these issues and to address some of these problems.

So, Mr. Chair, I think it's very important for all of us, when we look at – for the Members opposite to say there are no plans, that's not necessarily true. We are planning on a daily basis. We are being proactive in the way in which we want to move our government forward, the way in which we want to do our plans, the way in which we want to do our projects, so that the people of this province have the benefits, and the taxpayers of this province have the benefit because we're doing work more efficiently. We're doing it more effectively. We understand some of the issues and challenges that we have out there and we're making sure we're addressing that in the best interest of the people of this province so that they, the taxpayers, we, the taxpayers, will get a better return on our investment.

We will continue to work that, we will continue to implement the plans that we have put forward, and we will continue to work on the plans to make sure that when we do work, when we're out there, it's the best possible scenarios that we

have to the benefit of the people of the province and to the residents. So we will continue to do that.

CHAIR (Bragg): Order, please!

MR. HAWKINS: Sorry, Mr. Chair, I ran out of time. I would like to have another 15 or 20 minutes but –

CHAIR: I remind the speaker his time for speaking has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Order, please!

Before recognizing the next speaker, I'd like to remind everybody to please keep the noise down as low as possible. Sometime it gets a little – I understand you'd be a little rambunctious here on a Wednesday morning.

I look forward now to the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It is a pleasure to get up to speak on Interim Supply. I guess I would be remiss if I never acknowledged International Women's Day as well, but every day is International Women's Day in my house. I have a wife and two daughters and the pets are female. I have a male dog that's more with the wife, so everything with my world, I'm very well in tune to International Women's Day and women's day every day, so I want to acknowledge that and all of our female MHAs here in the House of Assembly, to the great work they do.

Mr. Chair, it's a pleasure to get up and speak on Interim Supply. I guess it's kind of nice to follow my critic, the Minister of Transportation and Works who I'm the critic for. He made a few points and, ironically, what he kept talking about during his time was this plan. And ironically, on top of my page, I've got written no plan. I find it a bit astounding – you listen to the back and forth and I guess I ask this question; I've said it before: Does anyone opposite ever go into a coffee shop or in the mall and sit down

and talk to people? Do they ever do that? Because –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. PETTEN: – I do that quite often in my district, and I enjoy it. Ironically, most everyone I speak to, they tell me they've got no plan, they had no vision, people don't trust them so – they're telling me that and a lot of these are Liberal voters, so I'm a bit at a loss, all of a sudden they have a plan, 15 months in and they're going to fix the world, but I've yet to see it, Mr. Chair.

One point too, the Minister of Transportation just got up and he spoke very passionately – you can't have it both ways. One part of it he's telling everyone we've overspent, we wasted all this \$25 billion dollars and everything is all bad; on the other end of it, we never spent enough because there are things falling down around us as in our terminals and that. They've got a plan and all these plans. Well, you know, the former administration actually spent over \$6 billion dollars in infrastructure in this province, Mr. Chair –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. PETTEN: – and I don't think, I've said it before and I'll say it here again – I wasn't a Member of the former administration in this House, but I worked with them – there are no apologies on this side for making good investments in this province. It was money well spent, and we'll continue if we have the opportunity. The Minister of Transportation once has talked about our terminals falling down around us. Well, do you know what? There could have been things a lot worse. You can't have it both ways. You can't be critical on one end and then –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

Can I have a little order?

MR. PETTEN: – critical for spending too much and then critical for not spending enough. What is it?

Mr. Chair, seeing we're on Interim Supply and we're talking about different budgetary decisions and whatnot: 24-hour snow clearing; I have talked about this many, many, many times, and I'll continue on because I believe it's an issue that is still, to this day, a great concern to lots of our residents and driving public. And the point that I want to make crystal clear in this House and to anyone that's listening – government opposite always try to make the point that there's only 13 routes out of 270-some-odd routes. What are you talking about? It was never 24 hours; it was five days here and seven here.

Those 13 routes take up – I don't have the exact numbers; we're looking at probably 70 to 75 per cent of our travelling public. They were put there for a reason. In 2008, it was brought in as pilot project under the former administration because there was a lot of outcry about our road conditions and wanting more enhanced snow clearing. They did it as a pilot project; they listed off I believe it was 10 or 11 main arteries for that reason – the busiest travelled roads.

In 2011, staff, officials within the department, assessed this pilot program. They actually thought it was so good they added to the list; they increased the list. Then, all of a sudden, four years later when government changed it, this is not a good thing, why are we doing this – to save \$1.9 million. And we know, and it was stated here in the House the other day, we know that figure is going to grow a lot more.

So you're saving on one end – you're estimating you're going to save \$1.9 million. I would be surprised when the dust settles that this never actually cost more. Most of your staff are working on overtime rate every single day. You've got a two-shift system covering three shifts. They're in overtime every single day. Almost every hour they're working, they're in overtime.

It's an ill-advised decision. I've been on record many times saying it, and I'm going to continue to say it, this decision is not a well-thought out decision. It's still a conversation when you go –

most people still are astounded that was made. Yet, when the pressure comes on the other side it was: We always had 24-hour snow clearing; I'm fear-mongering.

What is it? You can't have it both ways. It's clearly wrote in the budget document you cut your 24-hour snow clearing, crystal clear, for \$1.936 million. We fought to get the numbers for overtime cost and that didn't come easy for this year, so we got it up until January 30, I think, for \$3.7 million. We know there's a little over two months left in the year, it's going to rise to well in excess – this \$1.9 million savings will not be an issue. It's going to end up costing more. Again, no plan, an ill-advised decision.

It's something else when you go into this plan, before I go to my next topic – hope and optimism: This province had lots of it two years ago. We knew we had a bit of a rough patch coming, but you cannot do to the people of this province what this government has done since they've been elected in November 2015 and expect people to still have that bounce in their step. Because I tell you, there's not a lot of bounce left in people's steps anymore.

I hear it day and day, there are contractors wondering how they're going to survive; businesses have seen a huge reduction. Do you know one of the big things they tell you is? The gas tax and the insurance tax that really cut into the everyday family. Every family has to pay insurance; every family has to put gas in their vehicle. Most families have at least two vehicles in their driveway. It's the world we live in; it's no longer the one-vehicle home. Every home has at least two vehicles.

This really sucks the life out of our economy. The coffee shops are hurting. I actually know a guy who owns Tim Hortons and told me his profit margin is down. Now, everyone looks at Tim Hortons, there's a lineup in the drive through, and this person's telling me they've noticed an actual drop in their business. Do you know what they said it's attributed to? When the gas tax came on, because that extra money you're putting in gas, you might get a coffee, but you're not getting anything extra.

This doesn't stimulate the economy. We all know that taxes are not the way to grow the

economy. It comes back to one key point, there was no plan. This government had no plan. They got in there, all of sudden it was like here you go, here's the keys, you're in power. What do we do now? Okay, well, we'll just – like I said before, they got a sheet and until they balance it out, until they got the numbers to match, let it slide.

The economy in the province, people in this province are not impressed. The economy is not doing well and it's going to get worse. I think there was a lot of disappointment since November 2015, and it's not going away as much as the Members opposite would like to think otherwise.

Before my time is up, Mr. Chair, I'd like to just mention another point. The Minister of Transportation and Works mentioned about a five-year roads program and how he's taking the politics out of paving, how he's going to have a plan. All that sounds great, but I've said before, your actions and your words have to match.

Why in an election year, if you only have 50 per cent of your roads listed. You could list out and your hands will never be tied because if you're putting these on the list, that don't mean they're tendered. You can have 100 per cent of the roads listed out for all the years out if you have them all assessed. Next year, if something came up unexpectedly, you can have the caveat, you can have the disclaimer. Should anything unfortunate or unexpected arise, you can make adjustments.

People would like to know where their roads are listed to. You're driving our roads now – we know this time of year it's potholes, potholes, potholes. People would like to know, is this road on que to get done next year, the year after, this year? No, but you're not told that. You're given a list of roads that are being tendered and planned out, but only a portion of them, only so many of them.

Again, if the minister is so proud of his plan and he has a plan for the people, what's he hiding? Show us the list. Then you'll know, okay, it's five years' time before I get my road – the road is not going to show up in the list. It's all about this openness and transparency and your plan,

tell the public. I'm sure that a lot of people would like to know.

Again, he's not putting politics in paving. According to what he's saying he's taking it out of paving. Well, again, your actions need to match your words, and this is another case where it's not happening. You can't have it both ways.

Mr. Chair, in my last minute I'd like to point to another issue, talking about a plan. Last week I got up in the House and I threw out a few questions about Mistaken Point. It's a World Heritage Site, UNESCO designated site, something we all should be very proud of. So we asked questions and wondering: What's the status for this coming season?

The Minister of Tourism jumps up and tells me how it's going to be on a postage stamp. The federal government put it on a postage stamp; how comforting, how comforting. What about your obligations to the UNESCO designation? Do you what? I hazard to guess, outside if he was taken up for a visit he doesn't even know where Mistaken Point is to. If we asked him to take us and show us there, he may be able to point us in the direction, that's about it.

He told us with great pride, as the minister, it's on a postage stamp. Well, my guess is, Mr. Chair, his knowledge of Mistaken Point you would fit on a postage stamp.

So I caution Members opposite to be more serious about big issues like Mistaken Point and get their act together.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Order, please!

The Chair recognizes the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to acknowledge, as others have in the House, that today is International Women's Day. I'd like to certainly celebrate, especially an

empowering female figure, my own mother today.

I do want to say, earlier in the House – and I just listened to the Member opposite – the Member for Mount Pearl North put forward a petition calling for greater financial literacy to be taught in schools, financial management. And I would say, based on the information and the dialogue that's being put forward in the House today, that all Members of the Opposition could benefit by having a course in financial management because certainly over the last 12 years they've shown no restraint or no ability to adequately predict their own financial plan and the amount of misinformation that was being put forward.

The deficit they had projected and then what was provided, compared to where we were, was a \$900 million deficit became a \$2.2 billion deficit in the public accounts, and had we not taken action it would have been upwards of \$2.8 billion. It's absolutely disgusting to see that – we're taking action.

The Minister of Transportation and Works got up with a five-year road plan, talking about the predictability, talking about efficiencies, talking about better value. And for the Member opposite to get up talking about 24-7 snow clearing, because he's been putting a lot of misinformation, a lot of fear out there in the public. But when on those 13 routes – and there was only ever 13 routes that had 24-hour snow clearing – at any time that the demand warrants, there will be 24-7 snow clearing provided.

The minister has been very clear, but there are many days that there is no snow falling. So why would you staff a staff and pay wages during that time when there's no work required on those highways? When it makes sense to do so we will have staff out there, and that's what is being provided.

I can tell you one thing, I live on the Northern Peninsula and we had 79 centimetres of snow. The Transportation and Works crews are doing everything they can to clear roads and provide adequate service to the people. But there was never 24-hour snow clearing service to residents in my district, I will say.

I will say that we put forward, our Premier has put forward a vision for this province through *The Way Forward* document and there are many opportunities. I will take exception to the Member opposite from Conception Bay South saying that the information that I know about Mistaken Point would fit on a postage stamp because I can guarantee you, I've likely been to Mistaken Point more than he's ever been in Portugal Cove South.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MITCHELMORE: I've been at the pre-announcement; I was at the inscription announcement. I would ask him what he's actually done around Mistaken Point. I've been to that area –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR (Warr): Order, please!

MR. MITCHELMORE: – Portugal Cove South more than once.

In terms of the promotion, as a department, as the Tourism Minister I'm very proud of the promotion that we do. When I raised the postage stamp information, I talked about UNESCO and that we have a collaborative relationship with the federal government. I was proud that Canada Post is promoting Portugal Cove South's Mistaken Point on a UNESCO stamp, as they are with L'Anse aux Meadows, as they are with Red Bay. This is a good thing from a pan-Canadian perspective.

I said in the House, for him to say again, it's very disingenuous for the Member opposite to be saying – I clarified that we would be living up to our UNESCO obligations in the House. He's obviously not believing what I'm saying when he's still saying that all I said was that I was talking about a postage stamp. It's unbelievable. They just don't get it. They don't get it and they don't get financial management, that's one thing.

Now, one thing I can say, and I can proudly say as the Tourism Minister, is that last year we had a banner year in tourism. We are focused on doubling our numbers.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MITCHELMORE: Air traffic was up at Deer Lake Airport, record summer. The airport was up at St. John's. We had 2.45 million passenger traffic movements; 34 per cent increase in museums in the province; visitor information centres saw 130,000 people. Our heritage sites, for the first time in the province, almost hit 100,000 people. There's significant growth in regions.

We saw six new businesses open in Bonavista. There are clusters in and around the Bonavista Peninsula. Gros Morne saw a significant traffic increase; Fogo Island and everything that's going on there.

The St. Anthony and L'Anse aux Meadows region, in my very own district, saw significant growth. Red Bay has tremendous opportunities when we talk about UNESCO and Aboriginal tourism product for Labrador. The Burin Peninsula – and I can't forget Twillingate and the banner year they had and the business growth in that region.

We have a product development plan. We're growing tourism. We're focused on renewing our cultural plan. We invest in MusicNL and support our musicians across the province, ArtsNL and the investments that we put forward at our Arts Council, as well as our Cultural Economic Development Program, that I would say, Mr. Chair, is more than the national average.

Film development: We had \$46 million dollars in production last year; it was a banner year in film. We saw an increase over \$3 million dollars over 2015. So the investments that we're making in these industries, in our cultural industries, are paying dividends and it led to 600 full-time-equivalent jobs last year. The Heritage Foundation and The Rooms had increased in revenues and visitations and are receiving accolades.

We kept the Small Business Tax at 3 per cent, which is helping small business. Mining growth and Anaconda on the Baie Verte Peninsula, Mr. Chair, which you're very familiar with, there were over 85 jobs there; in Rambler, 200 jobs. It's really helping that cluster – the only

Canadian gold mine east of Ontario. And there are other opportunities; it's exciting to know that Altius Minerals has a tract of land up in my very own district that they've seen silver and copper and lead. So lots of opportunity here in this province.

We launched the Innovation Agenda, so we're moving forward; investments in accelerators in partnership with the Minister of AESL. Seniors received an Enhanced Benefit and the Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement; 74.6 million dollars last year in the budget. These are great opportunities that we're seeing.

I've spoken to chambers in Bonavista, Burin, Baie Verte, Corner Brook, the CBA – the Conception Bay Area – very optimistic, over 40 businesses added to CBS last year or moved in that area, so growth – growth, I say. So why is the Member from CBS so negative towards these initiatives in the budget if we're seeing so many opportunities that are happening in Newfoundland and Labrador?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MITCHELMORE: I would say that billions of dollars were lost under their administration because they cut to the lowest amount the upper income bracket; \$4 billion gone out of the economy because of their poor decisions.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, and on that note, Mr. Chair, I would move that the Committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): Order, please!

I'd like to remind all Members of the House that the Chair of Committees and the Deputy Chair of Committees are Officers of the House and hold no less authority when sitting as Chair or Deputy Chair than does the Speaker when I sit in this Chair. I still expect, when they sit in that Chair, that we maintain a level of order and decorum. I don't want to revert to what we had in previous years.

The hon. the Deputy Chair of Committees.

MR. WARR: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Supply have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report progress and ask leave to sit again.

MR. SPEAKER: The Deputy Chair of the Committee of Supply reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed him to report progress and ask leave to sit again.

When shall the Committee have leave to sit again?

MR. A. PARSONS: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, report received and adopted. Committee ordered to sit again on tomorrow.

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

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

With the consent of my colleagues opposite, I would suggest that the House recess until 2 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER: Under the Standing Orders of the House, the House is recessed until 2 this afternoon, being Private Members' Day.

Recess

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne) Order, please!

Admit strangers.

I welcome to the public gallery today Dr. Barb Barter, who is the mayor of Burgeo.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: For Members' statements today we have the Members for the Districts of Conception Bay East – Bell Island, Placentia West – Bellevue, Virginia Waters – Pleasantville, Mount Pearl North, Exploits and Bonavista.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I stand today to recognize the passing of a unique character and friend of mine from my district. Every community has a unique citizen that is endeared by all and is part of the fabric of that community. Bell Island had the late Frederick Clarence Spencer.

In his 93 years Freddy, as he was affectionately known, could be seen on a daily basis going into the woods and carrying out a piece of firewood sometimes twice his size, and walking the two to three kilometres to his home. Freddy had a real passion for the movies and worked most of his working life as an usher at the Prince Theatre on Bell Island.

But Freddy's unique talent was that he was a walking encyclopedia when it came to sports. Freddy had spent some time working in Boston, in the old days, as he would say, where he became a big fan of baseball and hockey. Freddy could stand around the bar and jump right into a conversation regarding present-day games or

games from 75 years ago, and could give a true analysis of what happened years ago and why, and what could happen today and why.

Freddy was an accomplished athlete in his own right. He enjoyed a good conversation, a good drink and good game. He asked society for very little, but appreciated everything he was given.

Rest in peace, big fellow.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BROWNE: Mr. Speaker, the values of tolerance, peace and respect are values we cherish, which each of us strive to promote to one another.

Recently in Chapel Arm, the This Little Light Project took place again this year with a hope to pass these virtues on to the young minds of Holy Family Elementary.

Hosted by the Masonic Lodge 1275 of Heart's Content, this seventh annual Friendship Ceremony was one of several held at schools in the Trinity Bay area. I thank Masons Eli Bryant, Kinsley Welsh and Randell Crane, as well as Stacy Harris of Communities Against Violence for taking the time on February 10 to be in Chapel Arm to participate and organize this ceremony.

As a lead up to the gathering, students made entries to a poster contest and I am very happy to extend congratulations to Syenna Murphy of grade three, and Isabella Smith grade five for winning the poster contest this year.

Well done, girls.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

I rise in this hon. House to recognize the achievements of two constituents of Virginia Waters – Pleasantville who were recently invested into the Order of Newfoundland and Labrador: Mr. William Mahoney and Mr. Vince Withers.

Mr. Mahoney's community leadership began in 1968 when he joined the Royal Canadian Air Cadets. He went on to serve, with distinction, as an Air Force reservist for more than 25 years.

He has shown his commitment to his community through service on both boards of the John Howard Society and the Rotary Club of St. John's, and has been involved with the St. John's International Airport Authority, the Downtown Development Commission and the St. John's Board of Trade, among many other commitments.

Mr. Vince Withers has a great exemplary service to the community in the areas of education, economic and business development, civic involvement and athletics.

In his business life, Mr. Withers has served on numerous corporate boards, and is a member of the Canadian Sports Hall of Fame. In 2006, Mr. Withers founded the Eating Disorder Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador and currently serves as its chair. He has also been accepted into the Order of Canada in 1998.

I ask all hon. Members in this House to join me in congratulating these outstanding citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to recognize the Mount Pearl Sports Alliance on a very successful annual Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony and Banquet. At the recent ceremony, two outstanding citizens were honoured and inducted into the Mount Pearl Sports Hall of Fame.

Mr. Speaker, this annual event is hosted by the Mount Pearl Sports Alliance, and it honours those individuals who have and, in some cases, still do, contribute to sports and athletics in a very significant way. It is through their individual commitment that we are able to continue the work and operation of sporting organizations in our communities in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members of the House to join me in congratulating the Mount Pearl Sports Alliance in honouring the achievements of these individuals. I would also like to congratulate specifically the two most recent inductees: under the category of Builder, Ralph Chapman; and under the category of Athlete, Jennifer Folkes.

Both of these individuals are very worthy of this honour. I would like to wish them all the best in their future endeavours and hope they continue their contribution to sport and to our community.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. DEAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Harry Harnum was born on June 19, 1932 in Bishop's Falls where he lived his entire life, married Julie Wells of Botwood, and they had six children – four sons and two daughters.

Harry initially worked as an aircraft refueler in Gander, but for the remainder of his working career he was employed by Harvey and Co., which later became Lewisporte Wholesalers, until his retirement in 1997.

Harry was a faithful member of the Calvary Pentecostal Tabernacle in Bishop's Falls and sang in the choir. He enjoyed salmon fishing and moose hunting. He played broomball beginning in the early 1960s on an outdoor rink.

His sons followed his example. Gary is the current fire chief in Bishop's Falls. His brother, Ed, is deputy fire chief. Craig is deputy fire chief in Corner Brook. Stephen is acting lieutenant in Conception Bay South, while his grandson,

Tyler, serves in fire services at DND, Trenton, Ontario.

On February 21, 2017, sad to say, Chief Harry passed away. He was laid to rest with much honour and, as well, a remarkable send off.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Bonavista.

MR. KING: Mr. Speaker, it is a distinct honour to speak about someone who's very dear to me. I've known Susie Duffett of Catalina all my life and those who live in our area will attest to what I have to say.

At 85 years young, Susie has dedicated her life to volunteering and helping others. It came as no surprise to anyone when Susie was awarded the Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers. This medal issued by the Governor General recognizes exceptional volunteer achievements of Canadians.

With over 50 years of volunteering, you'd be hard pressed if you didn't have some association with Susie. For me, she was a fixture of my childhood Sunday morning as she taught Sunday school for St. Peter's Anglican Church. For others it may have been with Girl Guides, a sports team, or one of the many organizations which she gave time.

Today, Susie's main focus comes from helping the Trinity Bay North Fire Department, sharing her life experience with kids of Catalina Elementary and with the local food bank. Pastor Gary Blackmore, chair of the food bank stated: She's our oldest volunteer and our best volunteer.

Susie may not have always been the oldest volunteer, but she's always been the best.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board and the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House to recognize International Women's Day in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. C. BENNETT: This year's national theme is Equality Matters and is a day to recognize women's achievements and acknowledge the challenges they continue to face in trying to achieve gender equality.

Throughout this week, women in our province and around the world celebrate women's accomplishments, while also recognizing areas that need additional action in order to achieve gender equality in our society.

Mr. Speaker, in communities across Newfoundland and Labrador, women's organizations, community groups, unions and business organizations will be hosting a wide range of events to highlight the work and accomplishments of women. These events give everyone, not just women, a platform to inspire, empower and motivate others to become involved and make a difference.

Mr. Speaker, on International Women's Day, I encourage all Members to reflect on the courage and determination of the women of our province who fought and won the right to vote and run for political office. We can imagine the day Lady Helena Squires entered the Chamber and took her seat as the first woman elected to the House of Assembly. These women paved the way for the women in this House today and also paved the way for all women and girls in our province. On International Women's Day, let us celebrate and honour that legacy.

We all have a duty as elected Members to continue to advance the status of women in our province by mentoring women and girls in our districts, by championing women in leadership.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the efforts of men and women throughout our province on this International Women's Day, and more importantly every single day of the year to advocate, be heard, to stand up and defend the rights of women and ask them to continue to be bold for change. Together we can create greater gender equality in our province and across this country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all my colleagues in the Official Opposition, I too would like to recognize International Women's Day and commend my colleagues here in the House as well.

International Women's Day is a day when we can all come together to celebrate the successes of women, to recognize that gender balance is needed and to all work towards equality.

It is an important day, not just for women, but for each and every person in our communities. It is a day when we can call on our peers, our family, our friends, our neighbours, our businesses and our community organizations to help promote a more inclusive and gender equal world.

Mr. Speaker, earlier this week, I had the pleasure of joining the International Women's Day committee in my district to celebrate International Women's Day. I would like to thank the organizers of this event and others like it, and thank all of those who recognize the need for gender equality and work for change.

As the theme of this year's International Women's Day is to be bold for change, if we all help each other and if we all focus on the next generation and encourage each other, we can and we will make a difference.

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.

What a joy it is to rise in this House on International Women's Day and to respond to a Ministerial Statement from a Minister Responsible for the Status of Women. Fifty years ago we would never have believed that this could happen. And it has happened because of the courage, the brilliance, the insistence, the persistence of women everywhere who have worked with passion, compassion and courage, with a vision that we could get here. There is still so very much work to do but today we celebrate, and I thank you sisters in the struggle. Let's dance!

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Mr. Speaker, I would like to welcome athletes, fans, organizers and volunteers to St. John's for the 2017 Tim Hortons Brier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MITCHELMORE: The Brier is one of the Canada's oldest and most well-known sporting championships. Starting last week with pre-qualifying, this year's tournament has attracted fans from coast to coast to coast, and has evolved into a television spectacle, drawing viewers from all around the world.

This is the second time Newfoundland and Labrador has hosted the Brier, and our government is honoured to invest \$300,000 in support of one of our country's premiere events. This is an exciting opportunity to showcase our province, and our love of curling to a national and international audience.

Mr. Speaker, a tremendous amount of behind-the-scenes work goes into a sporting event of this magnitude. I applaud the numerous organizers and volunteers for their vision, dedication and hard work, to make the 2017 Tim Hortons Brier a great success.

I would also like to wish Team Gushue, this year's provincial representatives, the best of luck on behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. They have done our province proud on the world stage, and they continue to make us proud as they compete at the Brier here on home ice. To date, there has only been one team from our province to win the national championship, Jack MacDuff's group which won in 1976.

Mr. Speaker, I wish our visitors a wonderful experience while here in St. John's, and I hope they take the time in between games to explore everything our capital city and the region has to offer.

I invite all hon. Members to join me in congratulating the athletes, fans, organizers and volunteers on a high-quality, world-class event occurring right here in our province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement this afternoon. Of course, on this side of the House, we join with government in welcoming athletes, sports enthusiasts and volunteers from right across the country to our capital city and our province as we host this year's Tim Hortons Brier.

I've had the pleasure, as some Members know, of attending a number of the draws, thus far, and I look forward to going tonight again, if I can stay awake. The atmosphere down at Mile One is absolutely amazing and I think it's going to continue to build as the tournament continues.

I think the Brier is really bringing people in Newfoundland and Labrador together. It's also

bringing Members of this House together. In fact, the Member for Bonavista and I shared some quality time at Mile One together in the past number of days.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: I know that will come as a surprise to some Members of the House, but we may even meet up down there again. So we'll see how tonight goes, I say to the hon. Member.

So much work goes into an event like this and I want to congratulate the organizing committee and everybody involved in putting off a truly world-class event. Thanks to everybody who has played a part in its success. I want to echo the minister's comments in wishing Team Gushue, our hometown favourites, all the best, and let's hope Team Newfoundland and Labrador wins the Brier this weekend.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. How proud are we of Team Gushue and everyone involved in this Brier. Eleven years since Brad and his crew won Olympic Gold, and how wonderful to again celebrate Jack MacDuff's brilliant 1976 victory. They have lifted our hearts and spirits, especially at this time of year.

Bravo to everyone involved, and we can celebrate already because, as a community, we have already won so much.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier made some comments publicly and has left people with the distinct impression that Emera now owns a majority ownership of the Labrador-Island Link.

I ask the Premier to clarify his comments and to tell this hon. House does Emera now own a majority stake in the transmission assets.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, I am surprised at the former premier of the province, and one of the individuals who debated in this House the contract related to the Muskrat Falls Project. He should know that answer.

Quite frankly, the way the project and the contract is designed, the transmission assets – Maritime Link, 100 per cent owned by Emera; the Churchill Falls to Muskrat link owned 100 per cent by Nalcor; and then the transmission line from Labrador into the Island is a shared arrangement with Emera and Nalcor.

As a result of the escalating price and cost that we will now see, Emera is in a position to assume the 59 per cent equity position into the LIL, which is the Labrador-to-Island Link. Coming with that is an 8.8 per cent rate of return on the transmission assets.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Well, the Premier's response is going to require much more clarity, I can assure you, because yesterday he made his comments that they had assumed it; they now have a majority stake in the ownership of transmission assets. And a little bit different from what he's saying today.

So, Premier, what has changed? What has changed in the contract? Have you done a new deal with Emera? Have you created a new contract with Emera? I know what was in the

contract, the 2010 contract, but what has changed since then?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, I just hope that someday I will get the opportunity to fix the contract.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: Unfortunately, right now, we do not have that option, Mr. Speaker. One hundred per cent of the Labrador-to-Island Link is controlled by Nalcor, but the equity position – and I want to just emphasize this – the equity position of the Labrador-to-Island Link right now, because they would have to maintain in the transmission projects, the three combined – and it is complicated, Mr. Speaker. It was a 49 to 51 per cent ownership; 49 per cent to Emera. But the only variable would be in the Labrador-to-Island Link and, therefore, because of the equity that Emera will put into this, they will now be in a position for 59 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, we will not know until this project is finalized what the percent will be in equity.

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

I can assure you that this is not going to provide me or anybody in the public with any type of confidence that the Premier knows what he's talking about here. The contract has options – the contract has options. And the contract even lays out that once the project is finished and the percentages are known and the inputs are known, then the outcome can be determined after the project is finished and the numbers are known. The Premier is saying today that that's changed.

So, Premier, have you done a new contract with Emera?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not so sure if we can get an early copy of Hansard, it would be very helpful at this point, Mr. Speaker, because I just said that. We would not know until this project is completed, what the final equity position would be for Emera. I'll just repeat that one more time. No change in the contract, I just said, until the project is completed.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, one thing that could change this would simply be that the Maritime Link price could escalate. That would actually change the position, 49 to 51 per cent over the overall transmission assets of the project. I just clearly said that. The contract hasn't been changed. I hope at some point we can, Mr. Speaker, because right now Emera is in the position, based on today's numbers, far different than what they were at sanction – Emera's in a position right now to have upwards of 59 per cent if this was closed today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, the contract clearly outlines options available to the government. It outlines an opportunity for Nalcor, on behalf of the province, and Emera to determine the way forward when it comes to overruns. There is a formula allowed. There are options allowed when it comes to overruns or cost overruns when it comes to the Labrador-Island Link. Generally speaking, the proportions stay the same.

How can the Premier say today it's going to be 59 per cent in one breath and the next breath saying it is not going to be known until the project is completed. You're causing confusion for the people of the province. Read the headlines and the news articles today, Premier, and it's no joking matter, I say to the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. P. DAVIS: This is not a joking matter. This is a very important matter.

Is this just simply fear mongering by you, Premier? Is that what this is about?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, I have been very clear in my comments that it will not be determined until this project is finalized, what the overall equity position would be. I've said that very clearly.

These are the people across from me today; they actually structured this contract, Mr. Speaker. They did it in a number of ways. They made assumptions, Mr. Speaker. When you want to talk about putting a contract together, they made an assumption that for 55 years oil would never go below \$100 a barrel. Mr. Speaker, fifty-five years. And am I frustrated with the fact that in just three short years we could see doubling of electricity rates in this province, Mr. Speaker, where Emera right now is in a position – no fault of Emera, Mr. Speaker, no fault of Emera. It's the fault of the people that put the contract into place in the beginning.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

It's quite interesting to listen to the Premier, because it wasn't that long ago he didn't know what was contained in the contract for the former CEO. His minister didn't bother to tell him, if she did know. He had a copy of it and didn't bother to read it; yet, now he wants us to expect and trust him that he's an expert in contracts all of a sudden, Mr. Speaker. Well, I can tell you, the people of the province are quite –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

It's been well established in the House, the only individual I wish to hear from is the individual standing to speak.

The hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

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

The people of the province are having difficulty trusting this Premier and this government, especially with this project. They're having significant trouble in trusting what they say and believing what they say. They fooled us once and they're going to fool us again. That's going to be a problem for Newfoundlanders and Labradorian; it is a problem for them today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. P. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier said that the people of the province will always maintain 100 per cent control of that transmission.

So I ask the Premier: Can you confirm that continues to be the case with this project?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: First of all, Mr. Speaker, I want to go back to some of the preamble of the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, it was people in his own caucus, his own caucus members had said just recently that they felt snookered, snookered, Mr. Speaker, hoodwinked in not having enough information to deal with at the debate when this project was sanctioned.

Mr. Speaker, I want to remind the Leader of the Opposition, doubling electricity rates in three years, assumptions saying that oil would never go below \$100 a barrel for, not five years but 55 years. Mr. Speaker, when you look at the history of oil, it hasn't been over \$100 for that many months, let alone that many years.

They put the contract in place. They should know what the rules are, and, yes, Mr. Speaker, I did say that Nalcor would have 100 per cent control. The equity-to-debt ratio is a very different situation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

The question was if the Premier will confirm that the people of the province will continue and will always maintain 100 per cent control of the transmission? He alluded to there – I think that was his answer. He wasn't quite clear. He was caught up on a lot of other stuff but I think that was his answer.

Now, I'll ask the Premier this: Can he confirm that the rate of return for all investors on Muskrat Falls, whether it be Emera, Newfoundland Power, Fortis, or maybe it could even be Hydro-Québec because we don't know what discussions they're having with them – can he confirm that the rate of return will remain unchanged from the original contract?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I just want to clarify the comment about the shared arrangements and why 100 per cent would be with Nalcor. It has to do with the shared arrangements and the equity position could be quite different.

Mr. Speaker, as it stands right now it's 8.8 per cent and, as you know, there have been lots of comments publicly. Our concern, my concern, the concern of the caucus, the concern of this government is that we put in place mitigating efforts, initiatives that will not see the doubling of electricity rates. It's the people across who are actually leading Question Period right now, did not – that wasn't a concern for them, wasn't a concern.

Remember, Mr. Speaker, let's remind the people of this province, it was the Opposition, today's Opposition who said we have done that much arrangements, we have done that much work in advance of this project, that this project will not go over budget. They could not foresee the day when this would go over budget.

Mr. Speaker, I ask him, in his preamble: Are we over budget today?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Maybe the Premier should have a discussion with his Minister of Finance. She was the chair of the board.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. P. DAVIS: Maybe she'll explain the project to him, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier as well, if he can confirm that this province still has transmission rights, as allotted for under the original agreement, and still has transmission rights to New England, through Nova Scotia and through New Brunswick as allotted by the original contract.

Do we still have those transmission rights, that preferential access to transmission?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the terms of the contract, nothing has changed with this contract, Mr. Speaker.

Included in the contract, however, what the PC Party are not talking much about today is that there are provisions. Emera protected themselves, because what they did is if they had a price overrun on their transmission line, over and above the 5 per cent, they made sure that Nalcor would be – the people of Newfoundland and Labrador would have to be taking part in those cost overruns. Unlike the conditions that are there for the publicly traded company from Nova Scotia, Mr. Speaker.

It is very clear, the burden of this project lies on the shoulders of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and it's very clear who put that burden on Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. It was the PC Party, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

The Premier never focused much on the answer to the question that I've asked him. He should remember that when he came back from New England, he talked about there are no markets in the states, nobody wants the power and he had a very dim view of the opportunities that existed.

Now, in the original contract it allows for preferential transmission at lower rates for Muskrat Falls power through Nova Scotia, through to New Brunswick and into the United States through New England.

So I'll ask the Premier once again, if he can confirm that that preferential, lower-cost access remains in the contract?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, when you invest in anything, if it's a hydro project or whatever it is, you would anticipate that at least you'd recover your cost. When I came back from the visit to the US and the meetings that we had with the US governors at the time, the issue wasn't: Do you want the power? The issue was: How much is your power?

And, Mr. Speaker, if the Members opposite think that there is a market for power from Muskrat Falls at a cost over 30 cents a kilowatt hour, I would ask the Members opposite to get me that information, because it has never come to me. There's a contract that's been just let with solar and wind in the US for around 6½ cents, and that is much, much lower than what we're seeing for hydroelectricity coming out of Muskrat.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Well, the Premier's alluded to rates a couple of times. Let's talk about rates.

I ask the Premier: Do you fully understand and recognize that you have much control over rates, and you have many opportunities to reduce the

rates to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians? And, if you do, maybe you can explain to us what those options are, for you.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. P. DAVIS: Don't tell me to sit down; I'll sit down when I ask the question, but my question to you is: Will you explain it?

We've asked you if you would use some of the options to reduce the rates for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. It's not in your numbers, it's not in your assessments, and it's not what you're saying to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll be a lot faster jumping to my feet than your former Finance minister, I can guarantee you that, on this one.

Reducing rates? Yeah, we can reduce rates. It would take a lot of money from the taxpayers of Newfoundland and Labrador to do it to the point of what we see, what we're facing. Doubling rates, Mr. Speaker, nearly 22 cents, that would put us the highest hydroelectricity rates – and I'm thrilled we're having this discussion, because it needs to happen. That would be over 22 cents; that would be the highest rates for any province in this country – the highest in the country.

The other two provinces that rely on hydroelectricity, being Manitoba and Quebec, they have the lowest rates – a stark difference.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The volume of noise in the Legislature is getting to the point that I can't hear the individual speaking.

The hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

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

Mr. Speaker, when this government talks about rates and the increase in rates, they fail to

include options for mitigation, which means options to lower the cost of electricity to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'll ask the Premier, his own new CEO, Mr. Stan Marshall, has said that excess revenue from sales of excess power is going to amount to \$3.5 billion in revenue to the project. We've asked this before, and the Premier and his government wouldn't answer it.

So I'll ask again: Will you use revenue from excess sales to reduce the rates to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would say that as Leader of the Opposition we were the first people in this province to make a case for the sale of surplus power.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: The sale of surplus power, Mr. Speaker. And we have fought and asked lots of questions in debate in this House of Assembly to get the previous administration, the PC administration, to allow the sale of surplus power for that money to go into rate mitigation.

Mr. Speaker, they, two a person, stood up and said that will go into the government and the government of the day will decide how will be spent. We had made a commitment to actually put the sale of the surplus power for rate mitigation. It wasn't until a debate with the former minister of Natural Resources, that then they decided, after much, much, much influence by us that they would put the sale of surplus power into rate mitigation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Well, we asked the government since we came in Opposition, since the Premier and the minister have taken office, if they were going to use it.

They've failed to answer in the past and that's why we asked the question again.

So once again I'll ask the Premier: How much of the \$3.5 billion –

AN HON. MEMBER: Billion.

MR. P. DAVIS: I said billion dollars – \$3.5 billion in sales from excess electricity will he put into reducing the cost of electricity to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and why doesn't he come clean with the people for once and tell us how much that will reduce the rate by?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I will say this that we're going to require much more than that if you listened to the CEO when he had made that comment, the sale was surplus power. And I hope there's enough there, Mr. Speaker. I truly hope that there's enough there to bring that right down to zero because there's nothing more that I would love to see is Newfoundlanders and Labradorians paying a low, low price for hydroelectricity.

We need to be competitive, but I will tell you right now, Mr. Speaker, the contract that they put in place does not allow for that to happen. So we will put the sale from any surplus power for rate mitigation, but based on the CEO's comments, just a few short months ago, that was between 1 and 2 cents, even less than that if memory serves me correct.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

For the very first time the Premier is giving us some numbers and some indication of how that will lower the cost from what his fear-mongering numbers have been to the public. So for the first time ever –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: I've used the practice in the past to silence Members and not allow them to speak for the remainder of the day. I'm sure that Members do not want that to happen today. The next outburst I hear today, the Member need not stand.

The hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

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

The Premier likes to throw out numbers; he throws out the really high numbers. He's refused to lower that rate to a more real level based on what the mitigation, the lowering of rates would be from the sales of excess energy, and for the first time ever – first time ever – he's alluded to that.

So there's another option for reducing costs to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and that's applying the rate of return. The 8.8 per cent rate of return; it comes back to the government as a result of the contracts that are in place.

So I ask the Premier: Will you also use the 8.8 per cent rate of return to lower rates to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: First of all, Mr. Speaker, my comments are not meant to be fear-mongering in any sense at all. It's not meant to be fear-mongering, but it is a reality. There's been much work done on where the rate would be in just three to four short years.

These numbers have been put out there not by me – these are not my calculations. These have been put out there by people at Nalcor and Newfoundland Power and so on. So, Mr. Speaker, this is where they see the rates going in the next three to four years based on what we know today.

As the Leader of the PC Party, what he's saying is that this is the first time that he's heard this? Mr. Speaker, well clearly he is one person that

hasn't been listening to what we have been saying.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

And again, the Premier now is going back to his old habits of not answering the question. So the rate mitigation is 8.8 per cent return on the investment being made by Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. He's already committed to applying the \$3.5 billion dollars in sales to reduce rates to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. His 22 cents, he threw out yesterday, is already down to 20 here today because he's providing the information to people, finally.

So how much more are we going to be able to reduce the rates by, from 20 cents down to what – is it 19, 18 or 17, when we apply the 8.8 per cent return on investment that's going to come back to the province?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've been doing quite a bit. As a matter of fact, an enhanced federal loan guarantee is another option that will actually – we'll use that savings towards rate mitigation, Mr. Speaker.

Keep in mind, though, Mr. Speaker, one of the troubling things that we have to deal with here is that the power purchase agreement that was put in place by the PC Party back in 2011 or 2012, whatever that year was, that they put in the power purchase agreement that says this here: Regardless of where the cost goes in this project, regardless of how much of the power you use, ignoring all those, that the ratepayers in Newfoundland and Labrador, the taxpayers, the seniors, the young people in our province, will have to pay 100 per cent of this project regardless of how much they use and regardless of what the cost is. That is the contract that the PC Party put in place, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: So, Mr. Speaker, I think it's become quite clear that he's not going to commit to using that as an avenue to reduce the cost of electricity to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. I've asked him a couple of times now today; he's not committing to that.

So I'm going to ask him about the loan guarantee, because the loan guarantee is the third option to reduce cost of electricity to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. There are three. There are excess sales, there's the rate of return, and there's the loan guarantee.

So I ask the Premier, specifically: Will you utilize the benefits from the loan guarantee to reduce rates and, if so, tell us how much lower will the rates be then – 18 cents, 17 cents? Where does that bring you in your calculations?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday to the members of the media – to the province, really – that we will explore whatever options we will have available to make sure that we have competitive rates in this province. I recognize that as a result of the contract that this former PC Party put in place, the hardship that it will create on Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Every member of this caucus recognizes that. If it's a federal loan guarantee, if the option to explore reducing the return on equity, we will explore all options.

But, Mr. Speaker, I can assure you this, whatever options we will have available to us, we maintain this, we will have to have competitive rates in this province. The people of this province cannot afford the contract that this PC Party put in place. They cannot afford that. It is not only one of their caucus members, when this was being debated, that got hoodwinked; it's the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

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

Mr. Speaker, it's a very serious issue, very, very serious issue. The government opposite has thrown out all kinds of numbers that inflame the actual circumstances. Yesterday, the Premier threw out a few numbers which caused significant concern for people without painting the full picture, giving all the information and telling the full story.

This is not a project for 20 years or 30 years; this is a 100-year project. This will benefit grandchildren and their children and their children in generations to come. So it's important that the Premier talk about the facts truthfully and openly and honestly and completely, not just take little pieces of information.

So I'll ask the Premier – he just said he's going to use ways to reduce the rates to make rates as low as possible for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians; we're glad to hear that.

I ask him: Will you use the benefits from the loan guarantee? Will you use the benefits from the rate of return, the 8.8 per cent, and apply that to reducing rates for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, I will tell the people of this province right now and everyone that sits in this House, a priority for this government is to make sure we have competitive rates. We will use whatever options that we have available to us to maintain competitive rates. That is not something that the former government – that is not something that the PC government did. They saw this as a way to reduce rates.

Mr. Speaker, what they forgot, though, is that there is a potential the oil could go below \$100 a barrel. I ask the Members opposite today: Is oil below \$100? They felt that oil would continue to grow over the next 55 years; up to almost \$300 a barrel and that would cover all the sins of the past, Mr. Speaker. Well, clearly, that is not what's happening today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Our province has the highest percentage of seniors on OAS and GIS. The majority of those are women who have helped build our economy by raising families and often working in underpaid or precarious jobs. Once they pay rent and heat, there is not enough to live on.

This being International Women's Day, I ask the Minister of CSSD once again: Will she commit to a portable rent subsidy program for seniors so these senior women can live in dignity and security?

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

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member for St. John's Centre for her question. The Member is aware that we are presently, at Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, doing an extensive review. I believe my staff have, in fact, met with the Member.

Mr. Speaker, we understand the need of seniors. We understand the resources available right now to seniors and we understand the resources that need to be available. We are working on the rent supplements. We are committed to try and assist seniors to live affordable.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So I've heard the commitment and we'd like to see action. It's cold comfort for those senior women who cannot feed themselves, who cannot afford vision care or dental care.

Mr. Speaker, our province has the highest rate of domestic violence in the country. Unions and women's groups are working together with governments across the country to establish paid domestic violence leave so women are able to

take time to deal with police, lawyers or find a new place to live.

I ask the Minister of Service NL: Will he commit to support legislation that allows for paid domestic violence leave?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

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

I can report to the Member opposite that there have been numerous discussions and meetings. I've met personally myself with Mary Shortall, the Federation of Labour president. The Women's Policy Office is working with the departments that would participate in potential legislation, and we're doing analysis now to see if it's something we can bring forward at the correct time.

This is an extremely important piece of legislation for our government to consider, especially considering the amount and significant difficulty it is for a woman after she has experienced a domestic violence incident and the disruption in her life and oftentimes the lives of the children that she is responsible for, so we take this very seriously and we look forward to making a decision in the short future.

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.

Women are still most often the primary caregivers for children. Daycare costs at least \$800 per month and many low-income families don't qualify for a subsidy, so the mother stays home.

I ask the Premier: When will this province have a public affordable and accessible child care program that meets the needs of all families, as they did in Quebec, and which reaped economic growth?

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, there's no doubt about it that it often falls to women who are the primary caregivers, for not just children but also for elderly family members in a lot of cases. We are aware of issues associated with child care costs in the province.

There was a report that was issued back in 2012, which was not very flattering for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in relation to the other provinces when it comes to the cost of child care. Since then, we have made up a little bit of ground. We continue to work with the Association of Early Childhood Educators in Newfoundland and Labrador and other stakeholders in the child care sector to try and find improvements. We have made some and if we can find any other ways to improve, we will do that as well.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Women hold the majority of precarious contract and minimum wage jobs. Our province has one of the lowest minimum wages in the country and did not keep up with inflation from 2010 to 2015. On International Women's Day, I ask the Premier: Whatever the results of the minimum wage consultations, will he commit to a catch up of workers' purchasing powers since 2010 as the base for indexation?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

MR. BYRNE: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to sincerely thank the hon. Member for her question. This government undertook a very comprehensive – this is still in process – consultation not only on our minimum wage increase, which we announced on April 1 of this year – we will be increasing the minimum wage under our labour standards a further 25 cents to \$10.75 per hour and then on October 1 of 2017, we will be adding another 25 cents. We will be

up to \$11 per hour, which is a substantial increase of 50 cents in just one year. We've consulted with businesses and organizations, the consultation is still underway.

Also, Mr. Speaker, as the hon. Member pointed out, what is absolutely critical to this piece, what is absolutely critical to this process, we have committed to a process to increase minimum wage based on a cost of living standard, an economic indicator, and that, Mr. Speaker, will help not only men but women, all minimum wage earners.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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.

Pursuant to section 26(5)(a) of the *Financial Administration Act*, I am tabling one Order in Council relating to a funding pre-commitment from the 2017-18 fiscal year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

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

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

WHEREAS many feel their problems and concerns are not being addressed within an appropriate and timely manner;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly call upon the House of Assembly, urging government to use all-party town hall events as an avenue whereby people can express their concerns to all parties.

As in duty bound, your petitioners ask to be heard.

Mr. Speaker, I find this petition very interesting. As an MHA, we present petitions that are given to us. It's our responsibility. It doesn't matter whether we agree with them or not, but it's really good when you get a petition in your hand that you do agree with.

The people who have signed this petition, Mr. Speaker, are recognizing something very important about democracy, and that is having avenues open to the people to express their views and to get involved in discussions. Here today in the House of Assembly we've had questions that we have raised with regard to the situation of life for women when it comes to minimum wage, when it comes to seniors not being able to afford their own homes, when it comes to the lack of child care.

Imagine how wonderful it would be if we had all-party standing committees where we could have open discussion on these issues and have people come to the all-party standing committees and put forward why government has to move forward and bring concrete proposals to government. Because the all-party committee would be able to bring in expertise for everybody to hear together, for all parties on the committee to get the same information, and perhaps we might come to some agreements on programs that we need in the province, if we had that open kind of dynamic, Mr. Speaker.

They have that kind of dynamic in Ottawa at the House of Commons. I myself, and I'm sure others, both here on the floor and in the public

gallery, have been themselves at all-party committee meetings in Ottawa where they've sat and spoken to the committees and been grilled by them.

We did it when we had the all-party committee on the Northern shrimp. Even as MHAs, we went to that all-party committee in Ottawa and presented. It's a way of really making democracy work, and this is what these people who signed this petition are talking about.

People are very, very frustrated. They are frustrated with consultations where they have gone and are controlled within the consultation. That's what they've said to us. They go and questions are presented to them. They don't get to create their own questions. I have to say, when I presented to the Task Force on Educational Outcomes I was very pleased that it was a completely open structure. But that was a task force set up by government. Imagine if we had that structure where we had standing committees that could listen to the voices of the people.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS *Budget 2016* implemented a regressive tax on books in this province; and

WHEREAS Newfoundland and Labrador is the only province in the country to have such a tax; and

WHEREAS a tax will undoubtedly affect literacy rates in this province as well as negatively impact local authors and publishers;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to immediately cancel this ill-conceived book tax.

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

Mr. Speaker, this is an issue that's been raised repeatedly in this House of Assembly by both Opposition parties; and it's one we will continue to raise. We're hearing from seniors that are affected by this book tax; we're hearing from families that are affected by this book tax; we're hearing from teachers, people working in the school system who are feeling the impact of the book tax. We're hearing from university students, who spend an awful lot of money on books, who are affected by it as well.

Not to mention the impact on our culture and our heritage; our provinces artists, our provinces authors, our provinces publishers. There's concern from a variety of sectors of our community, and for good reason. We are now the only province in Canada that has a tax on books. It's shameful, Mr. Speaker. There is a better way.

I recognize that government in the previous budget and government in this upcoming budget has very difficult choices to make. We acknowledge that. The concern here is that the wrong choices are being made. There are far better ways to generate revenue or reduce expenditures rather than resorting to a tax on books that's affecting our children and our families, and our schools and our seniors, and our cultural and heritage sectors in a major way. So this is a wrong move.

Then on top of that, we've had all the controversy surrounding our provinces libraries. They're going to close them; they're not going to close them. They're going to study them; yet, failing to acknowledge the critical role that many of our libraries play in community life in this province, particularly in rural areas.

So it's a snowball effect of multiple bad decisions that's really affecting our communities in a negative way. This is one that just makes no sense. There are better options. There is a better way. I hope that government will come to terms with that and cancel this ill-conceived book tax that made no sense from the very beginning.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island for about a minute and a half.

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS there have been an identified lack of mental health services in our province's K to 12 school system; and

WHEREAS the lack is having a significant impact on both students and teachers; and

WHEREAS left unchecked, matters can and in many cases will develop into more serious issues;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to increase mental health services and programs in our province's K to 12 school system.

And in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I spoke to this, as we've already identified the stressors that are being faced by parents in their households, particularly the young people, in being able to be active in the school system and be active in social life; the challenges within our school system now with overcrowding, with blended classrooms, with some of the challenges around inclusion that there are extra stressors being added to these young people.

Society is offering extra stressors when it comes to social media and all these things. We need to ensure that young people who need some additional supports, who need some types of interventions and some types of counselling, have that available. What better place than in our school system when you have a captive audience. You have an ability to identify particular needs and deal with that.

Mr. Speaker, I'll have an opportunity to speak to this again and make some suggestions around some of the programs that should be implemented.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Day

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

It being 3 o'clock on Wednesday, I call on the Member for St. John's Centre to present her private Member's resolution.

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

I rise today to move the following private Member's resolution, seconded by my colleague, the hon. Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi:

WHEREAS the federal government has introduced pay equity legislation in the public sector; and

WHEREAS pay equity has been proven to not be universally achieved by collective bargaining alone; and

WHEREAS lack of pay equity disproportionately affects women and women in Newfoundland and Labrador earn, on average, 66 per cent of the wages of their male counterparts; and

WHEREAS government needs to give leadership on this issue of fairness to women;

BE IT RESOLVED that the House of Assembly urge government to start the process to enact pay equity legislation in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy to stand on International Women's Day to present this private Member's motion. As we know, pay equity is an issue of fairness, it is an issue of human rights and it's time has not only come, it's long, long overdue.

I believe that it is something that we as a province can do, that we as a province must do. Others have gone before us and have enacted pay equity legislation in both the public sector and the private sector, and it has resulted in fairness and equality which empowers not only individual women, but empowers families, working families. That's what we're going to be talking about today, Mr. Speaker.

Before I go further, though, I'd like to also welcome women from all over the province and our allies who are either in the gallery here today, who are watching online, who are watching on TV or who are using Twitter or other forms of social media to encourage their representatives, to encourage all of us here in the House today to support this private Member's motion.

Not because it's a private Member's motion, but because it is the right thing to do. It's because we can do this. There is now no longer any viable reason not to do this. So throughout the debate, we will be looking at issues of pros and cons. I can't imagine any viable con, contradiction, to this private Member's motion but we can look at what is being done throughout the country and what has been done historically here in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador because we have made great gains in the area of pay equity in the public service but we still have a way to go.

I believe that this is about the way forward; anything else would be a way backward. I know that no one here in this province wants to see that happen. I know that we all want to see us go forward. Again, I remind the House, and I remind those who are watching, that this is a fundamental principle of human rights – and I'll be able to talk a little bit more about that a little bit later.

But the other thing I would like to do right now, Mr. Speaker, is to read a message from PANSOW, which is the Provincial Action Network on the Status of Women, because they're doing a very interesting action right now that is symbolic of the growing wage gap between women and men in our province. It's an action that says: Stop; let's really look at what the impact is on the lives of the women of

Newfoundland and Labrador and, consequently, the lives of their families and their communities.

And if you would permit me, Mr. Speaker, a message from PANSOW – again, PANSOW is the Provincial Action Network on the Status of Women, so it's a collective voice of all the Status of Women Councils across the province, and many of us here in the province do have Status of Women Councils in our districts who serve the people in our districts so well. Who not only work directly providing service, but also do advocacy on equality for women, which when we have women – equality for women means it empowers our whole communities. When our communities are safer and fairer to women, they're safer and fairer to children, to men, to all of us.

The gender wage gap in Newfoundland and Labrador is the highest in the country. The gender wage gap means that women are making less than men for the same work. Even with the most conservative estimate of the gender wage gap reported to *The Globe and Mail*, women in Newfoundland and Labrador are working 18 per cent of their day for free. So that's an illustration of, because of the gender wage gap, 18 per cent of the time that women work because their wages are unequal, they're doing it for free; it's unpaid labour.

This is no longer acceptable. The Newfoundland economy can no longer thrive on the backs of women's unpaid labour. In protest of the gender wage gap, the member organizations of PANSOW are leaving work at 2:44 in the afternoon today to signify the time in which their labour becomes free.

The St. John's Status of Women, Lab West, Mokami and Bay St. George Status of Women Councils will end their workday at 2:44 on International Women's Day. The four other councils will follow later during International Women's Day week.

We also do this in solidarity with our union sisters, the international Women's March, and for the many women who cannot march because their work is essential services or because of poverty, disability, lack of child care or fear.

The economy cannot thrive with half the population left behind. When more women work, economies grow and increase in female labour force participation or a reduction in the gap between women's and men's labour force participation results in faster economic growth. So I also invite people today to use the #PayEquityNL, or #closethegap or #NLwomenrising.

Now, the world economic forum said: At the current rate of change, the global economic gender gap won't be closed for another 170 years. Mr. Speaker, I don't think we can wait that long. I wouldn't think any of us would want to wait that long. The time is now.

And Canada, which Newfoundland and Labrador is part of Canada, has also tumbled down the forum's global rankings to 35th place due to factors such as wage inequality, earned income and the share of women in Parliament. So if we look around our House of 40 Members, 10 are women; so 25 per cent of the representatives here in the House today representing 52 per cent of the population, only 10 per cent are women. And we know how important it is to have women here. Only three out of 13 Cabinet Members are women.

And we've all heard these statistics before, but what we do know it's in these houses of power, in board room tables, in tables at Cabinet where decisions are made, and that's what we're talking about here today: how to empower women, how to make sure that women have a fair and equal footing in our communities.

Now, pay equity – and that's what we're talking about, Mr. Speaker – means equal pay for work of equal value. It's not equal pay for equal work. It's about looking at what kinds of jobs have equal value in a workplace or in our community. It is a process that corrects discrimination in compensation practices, to adjust the wages of employees in traditionally female jobs so they are at least equal to the wages of employees in male job classes, when they are found to be comparable in value, based on skill, effort, responsibility and working conditions. Labour, women's activists, equality-seeking groups have done a lot of work to help us understand the principles of pay equity. I'd like to look at

what's happening in Canada around the area of pay equity.

Six of the 10 provinces and the federal government for its jurisdictions have pay equity legislation that covers either its public sector or public and private sector. Three provinces, including Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador, and British Columbia, have not enacted pay equity laws, but what we have is a policy framework for negotiating pay equity with specific public sector employees.

In Newfoundland and Labrador pay equity in the public sector was agreed to and implemented in the late 1980s as part of the collective bargaining process. So it's not enshrined in the law; it's a policy framework, which means it's used in collective bargaining. We've had great work. We've undergone great work. We do have a very established level of pay equity, but that can be chipped away because that is only a policy, it's not enshrined in our law. We do not have pay equity legislation.

It also doesn't extend out to the private sector. So moving to legislation in Newfoundland and Labrador would mean it would be a legislated requirement across the public sector and the private sector, and pay equity legislation is needed and important because closing the gender pay gap creates fairness and equity for women, and also it improves women's economic independence. That means it lowers their risk of poverty, which is higher for women than men.

It isn't just about the current time when you receive a paycheque; it also affects what women's pensions will be. So it has a long-lasting effect. Pay equity reaches into the lives of senior women. Their pensions are affected; their savings are affected. How many of us are encouraged to save for their pensions? How many of us are encouraged to buy RRSPs? Pay equity affects that; it reaches right into the senior lives of working women. So it's good for business. It allows employers to recruit and retain the best employees because wages are fair and do not discriminate because it is a female-dominated job class.

And another point is that Quebec and Ontario have pay equity legislation and this has been done successfully, and the acts and the processes

are well developed and can be modeled in our jurisdiction.

So what we're doing, people will say: Well, this is 2017. Surely, heavens, women are paid on the same basis as men. Well, there's a study that was done not so long ago by a young economist, economic student by name of Kerri Neil at Memorial University and she looked at Newfoundland and Labrador labour market investigation. She has uncovered where it is we see incredible and surprising inequities in payment for women.

Again, it's 2017; it's no longer acceptable. I believe that nobody here in this House would find it acceptable that women are not paid for the same work, for work of equal value on the same level as men are paid. None of us would accept that. We would not accept that for our daughters, for our wives, or our partners, for our sisters, for our colleagues, for people in our community. We would not find that acceptable.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to just quickly look at the history of pay equity in the province. The reason we have pay equity framework in Newfoundland and Labrador is because the labour movement and the women's movement and equality seasoned groups have pushed for it, and they have been pushing for it for years.

I see I'm going to be running out of time, but I'm looking forward to the debate where we can talk about some of the specifics of pay equity and look at the history of pay equity in the province. But again, I believe that some people will be confused and they'll say: But we have pay equity; we have it in the province. Again, what we have is a policy framework for the public sector.

Now, people are going to say: Well, we can't afford pay equity. Well, yes, we can. We've already done it in the public sector here in the province. And there are ways to help the private sector do this successfully. I'll be able to talk about that a little bit further.

It could be, in fact, that the government Members or the Opposition may add amendments to this private Member's motion, and if there are amendments that will strengthen the private Members' motion, I'd say welcome,

that would be great. But I do hope that we not going to be playing politics with this amendment. It's clear that we need to do this and let's not play games.

To not support this, I don't know how any Member of this House will be able to go back to their communities and say to the women of the province, I'm sorry, we can't afford to support this. It's not about money; it's about a basic human right. It does not cost a lot, and I believe that we can do this on International Women's Day.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

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

I'm pleased to stand in the House today to discuss the private Member's motion concerning pay equity. As Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, and as a representative of constituents of my District of Windsor Lake – and of course as a woman – I am very passionate about gender and pay equity. It is indeed timely to discuss advancing women's economic equality on International Women's Day, as we celebrate women's achievements both individually and collectively, and we reflect on the challenges we continue to be faced with in trying to achieve gender equality.

I am pleased to support today's private Member's motion on pay equity.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. C. BENNETT: In my Ministerial Statement earlier today, I urged us, as elected officials, to reflect on the struggle of the suffrage movement that won women the right to vote and run for political office. And a struggle it was. But the women who came before us took it on; women like Armine Gosling, and Fannie McNeil. They organized and lobbied; they informed decision makers and the public about how women's equal representation in society benefits everyone.

Ensuring the rights and interests of women and children are represented in decision-making tables is crucial to achieving socio-economic equality for all. We can look back and imagine Lady Helena Squires's first day in the House of Assembly; one female voice in a room. I think it's also important to highlight that as the wife of Sir Richard Squires, Lady Helena had access to decision makers. She was well acquainted with the day-to-day of politics, and she had the resources to campaign. Access is crucial when we consider how to encourage girls and women to become leaders, to get involved in politics, and as elected officials we can help provide that access by mentoring girls and women in our districts.

We really ought to reflect on the fact that women have only been able to vote for about a century. That's it. Decisions and processes around governments were made at tables of men, before that. So we have a lot of catching up to do, and advancing the status of women involves striving for women's economic equality. Chapter 15 of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* concerns equality rights, and says that "Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability."

Today, we can also recognize that 2017 marks the 35th anniversary of the signing of the Constitution Act of 1892 by the Honourable Pierre Trudeau and Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth that enshrined the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Oxfam Canada and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives also just released a report on economic equality, called *Making Women Count*. I'd like to read this statement from the report: "Examining inequality through a gendered lens helps us understand how social factors determine who ends up where on the wealth spectrum." It also reveals "deeply held and often unconscious biases determining who has access to jobs, wages and wealth."

According to the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development, Canada has the 7th

highest gender-wage gap of the 34 industrialized countries. There are a number of ways to look at gender gap in income. Stats Canada has reported the following in recent years.

A 2011 study comparing the annual earnings by gender for both full time and part-time workers show that women workers in Canada earn an average of 66.7 cents for every dollar earned by men. If we look at annual earnings under full year, full-time workers, women earn 74.2 cents for every dollar a man earned in 2014. If we look at hourly wage rates as another basis of comparison, women earn 87.9 cents for each dollar a man earned in 2016. And in Newfoundland and Labrador, women earn 83 cents on the dollar.

There are a number of factors that lead to economic inequality between women and men. Women do a disproportionate amount of unpaid work, like caring for families and homes, which will mean women have less time for paid work. Women are three times more likely to work part-time than men. While 13 per cent of women say they work part-time to care for children, less than 2 per cent of men do the same.

Women are more likely to leave the work force to care for families. This significantly impacts women's earning potential via promotions, seniority and pensionable earnings. Predominantly female fields are traditionally undervalued. There is also a bias that leads to men being offered higher wages and rates of promotion than women from the very beginning of their working lives.

When we look at the top 1 per cent of income earners in Canada, 78 per cent of them are men. Women make up only 2 per cent of Canada's 100 highest-earning CEOs. We certainly have some catching up to do, and that catch-up involves improving access to child care because child care is disproportionately a responsibility of women which impacts participation of women in the labour force.

Mr. Speaker, I have been a long advocate for full-day kindergarten, and our government implemented full-day kindergarten, an initiative that supports young families and helps improve women's access to the labour market. Our Premier has mandated the Minister Responsible

for Education and Early Childhood Development to ensure that the compensation of early childhood educators is reflective of their training and their contribution to our province's children by achieving an increase of \$3 over three years as part of the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement.

This commitment benefits women's economic status twofold. It improves the recruitment and retention of those educators which again allows women more flexibility to participate in the labour force and also early childhood educators is a female dominated profession. So increasing their income will improve those educators' economic status.

Through our Department of Education and Early Childhood Development our government supports a number of other child care related initiatives which help increase women's access to workforce, including: the child care subsidy program which provides a full or partial subsidy for costs of child care for young children; the operating grant which lowers the fees for child care by providing organizations with an operating grant; and the early learning and child care directory, an interactive online map that makes it easier for parents to identify child care organizations that are convenient for them.

Achieving women's economic equality involves championing family-friendly policies that improves women's access to income and decision-making roles. I commend my colleague, the hon. Member for Burgeo – La Poile and the Government House Leader, for being an advocate on this front by providing more predictability and stability around the House of Assembly schedule and moving away from night sittings of the House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, women's economic equality benefits everyone. By increasing women's participation in the workforce, we are addressing a challenge facing our province today, a shrinking workforce in the face of an aging population and the lowest population density among provinces.

Women are also under-represented in self-employment; 37 per cent of self-employed

individuals are women. By increasing women's access to self-employment, we are tapping into the innovation and creativity of women as entrepreneurs.

AESL supports the Newfoundland and Labrador Organization of Women Entrepreneurs, recognizing the entrepreneurial potential of women. Improving women's economic status can partially be achieved by helping them break into male-dominated occupations that are well paying, such as the skilled trades.

The Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour provides funding support to the following organizations to improve access to male-dominated professions: the Office to Advance Women Apprentices; the Women in Resource Development Corporation; and Women in Science and Engineering. We recognize that women play a growing role in supplying the demand for skilled trades and that the increased attention, funding and initiatives specifically geared towards women apprentices and journeypersons is having a positive impact.

However, initiatives such as gender equity and diversity agreements that mandate gender targets for companies in the offshore mining, and help women progress through their apprenticeship and assist women in selecting skilled trade occupations, needs to be expanded to ensure that all those women that have put their hopes and their dreams in the possibility of working in the skilled trades, that they are provided an opportunity to work on our infrastructure projects and to work in all projects in this province, Mr. Speaker.

These are some of the initiatives that help advance women's economic status. Pay equity is another initiative to advance the economic status of women. So the concept of equity – let's consider that for a second. A pretty popular analogy is an oval racetrack. The runners on the inner lanes have an advantage. They have a shorter distance to run to the finish line than those in the outer lanes. An equitable solution to the unequal lengths of the lanes is to stagger the starting positions of the runners. Equity addresses the disadvantages of those with longer ways to go.

Mr. Speaker, women's work traditionally has been unpaid, undervalued. Caring for families and their homes, female dominated professions have traditionally been undervalued, and pay equity helps address this gender bias by comparing jobs usually done by women with jobs that are usually done by men. Pay equity processes try to quantify, to measure, to compare for example, the manual skills needed by a word-processing operator, which is likely a female-dominated profession, and the manual skills of a machinery repair person, a male-dominated profession. Are the manual skills of one, or more, more important than the manual skills of the other? An equally important question: Are the manual skills of one or more valued by society more than the manual skills of the other?

Women are not receiving equal pay for equal value, and pay equity involves measuring or quantifying a job's components so that it can be compared to others. And looking at factors like skill, effort, responsibility and working conditions, helps us to understand and compare male- and female-dominated professions. We can learn from other jurisdictions' approaches to pay equity and, more broadly, their approaches to helping achieve women's economic equality.

On International Women's Day, we celebrate the achievements and reflect on the challenges ahead. As Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, I am committed to helping advance the economic status of women. I look forward to the remainder of debate on this most important issue and I look forward to supporting the motion that the House is debating this afternoon.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, am very, very pleased to stand in support of the resolution that's been brought before the House today by the Member for St. John's Centre.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. PERRY: It certainly has been a great first two weeks in the House for us. Last week, we talked about women here in the House as well on Private Members' Day. So it's certainly something I'm very happy to be seeing happen right here in this House.

I'm going to start out by talking about what pay equity is, as my colleagues have already outlined. Pay equity does not mean that everyone is paid the same wage for an hour of work, but it does mean that people should be paid equally for work of equal value.

I can refer to an incident in my own experience. I used to work, in a former life, for the Community Economic Development Board, the zonal boards. We did our own thing in our own districts, but we got together once or twice a year. What was really interesting is when we, as executive directors, sat down to talk, there were two women and there were six men and the two of us women were paid half the salary of our counterparts. I was 27 at the time and that was my first realization of what gender inequity was. By just the mere fact that we were women, we were paid half the salary. And we got set to work and we got that rectified.

As defined by the Government of Canada, pay equity is a fundamental human right. Pay equity addresses gender-based wage discrimination, and its goal is to stop discrimination related to the under-valuation of work traditionally performed by women. And this debate reminds us as well about last week's debate where we talked about the participation of women in leadership and political roles. We talked about how women only recently acquired the right to vote and run for office, and how this oversight reflected the way women have been viewed and valued in our society historically.

A major change happened following the First World War. That war and those that came after it sent a great many men out of our country to fight, while leaving the bulk of the industrial and manufacturing work that needed to be done at home, to women. And the women stepped up. They fought to ensure that they were not paid less than men for doing the very same job. Pay equity, it's not just about doing the same work;

it's also about re-thinking how we define and compare the value of the work. Why is it that historically people thought of the work that men did as being worthy of higher pay than the work women generally did? Did those different pay rates properly reflect the relative values of the work to our society? We do not believe they did. We believe that those inequities continue to exist.

A strong proponent of pay equity south of the Canadian border was US President John F. Kennedy. When he signed the equal pay law in his country in 1963, he said it affirms our determination that when women enter the labour force, they will find equality in their pay envelopes. Nearly, I guess it was 50 years ago, in Canada, in 1967, Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson appointed Florence Bird to chair our own country's Royal Commission on the Status of Women.

The Commission's 167 recommendations were based on the core principle that equality between men and women in Canada was possible, desirable and ethically necessary. So I'm going to talk a little bit about sections of that report Mr. Speaker.

In paragraph 172, we find this statement: "Women generally work in a few occupations labelled 'female,' earn less money than men and rarely reach the top. This has been the situation for so long that society takes it for granted. In fact, its very familiarity probably does as much to maintain the *status quo* as any of the arguments offered in its defence." So in other words, if no one stirs the pot, people will simply accept that this is the way it is and the way it is supposed to be.

As a person, as a young woman born in the 70s, I was born with the privilege of being able to vote. I never ever felt that I couldn't do something because I was a woman, but I had that belief because of the women who came before me and who fought the good fight. As I move in non-traditional fields, I guess, as I pursue my own career, I do see that those inequities still very much exist. And it is crucial, even though, like many have said, we've come a long way, we have miles and mile and miles to go. It is crucial that we continue to talk about it until equality is actually achieved.

In that same report there's a brief history of the laws that were put in place to address inequities. "Within Canada, legislation dealing with equal pay for equal work began to appear on the federal and provincial statute books. Ontario took the lead with the passage in 1951 of the Female Employees Fair Remuneration Act, subsequently replaced by other legislation. Other provinces adopted similar legislation, some as recently as 1969. In 1956, the federal government passed the Female Employees Equal Pay Act, applicable to employers and employees engaged in works, undertakings and businesses under federal jurisdiction and to federal Crown Corporations.

"All provinces, as well as the Yukon and the Northwest Territories, now have anti-discrimination legislation." However, "in spite of the fact that most employees in Canada are covered by legislation prohibiting different rates of pay on the basis of sex, briefs we received cited cases of different scales for women and men. Time after time it was made abundantly clear that some employers and unions are evading, if not the letter of the law, at least its intent." Again, that's from the same report, Mr. Speaker.

They made the following recommendation on paragraph 239, "...we recommend that the federal Female Employees Equal Pay Act, the federal Fair Wages and Hours of Work Regulations and equal pay legislation of provinces and territories require that (a) the concept of skill, effort and responsibility be used as objective factors in determining what is equal work, with the understanding that pay rates thus established will be subject to such factors as seniority provisions; (b) an employee who feels aggrieved as a result of an alleged violation of the relevant legislation, or a party acting on her behalf, be able to refer the grievance to the agency designated for that purpose by the government administering the legislation; (c) the onus of investigating violations of the legislation be placed in the hands of the agency administering the equal pay legislation which will be free to investigate, whether or not complaints have been laid; (d) to the extent possible, the anonymity of the complainant be maintained."

Mr. Speaker, these clauses refer to legislation in 1967, and to this day we are still fighting to actually see a lot of them put into practice in our day-to-day life.

Researchers from York and Carlton Universities have provided a useful compendium of pay equity resources in Canada. They say that legislated pay equity policy has been in effect in Canada since the 1970s.

The Province of Quebec was the first to enact an equal value provision in its *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms* in 1976. Since then, nine of Canada's 10 provinces, all except Alberta, have implemented pay equity law or policy. Six of these provinces have passed pro-active legislation that mandates employers to comply with procedures to redress gender-based wage inequities while the others are complaint driven, and that means they require the employees to file a complaint of pay inequity.

All pay equity laws apply to the narrow public sector and most apply to the broader private sector. Only three jurisdictions, including Ontario, Quebec and the federal jurisdiction, actually extend to the private sector.

Regarding our own province, the legislation says: the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador formally endorsed the principle of pay equity in May of 1988 – that was our province's position, sorry. Although no legislation was passed at that time, implementation of pay equity was applied to the Newfoundland public service using a joint management union process. Five major public sector unions were involved in the pay equity implementation. And we're going to talk about that a little bit more, Mr. Speaker, as the day goes on.

It is interesting that this May of 1988 agreement of the Peckford PC government was significantly eroded by the Wells Liberal government in 1991, an injustice that was not rectified until 2006 when the Williams PC government made an ex gratia payment of \$24 million to right the Liberals wrong. And as I said, we'll have more to say on that if time permits in our speaking throughout the day.

Manitoba was the first jurisdiction to legislate a proactive pay equity statute in Canada. The *Pay*

Equity Act was effective in the province in 1985 and it applies to the broader public sector. Alberta has not passed pay equity legislation, but the *Individual Rights Protection Act* prohibits differentiating wages paid to male and female employees performing similar or substantially similar work.

Mr. Speaker, the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, known as LEAF, also published a fact sheet on pay equity in 2011. It stated that in the late 1980s and early 1990s a number of the provinces adopted pay equity legislation, although not everyone is covered, and particularly workers in the private sector.

Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and PEI have pay equity legislation that covers public service employees. There are pay equity policy frameworks in British Columbia and Saskatchewan, and pay equity negotiations with public sector unions in Newfoundland, but no actual laws compelling employers to ensure that there is pay equity in their compensation practices.

Ontario and Quebec are the only provinces with comprehensive, proactive pay equity legislation that covers both the private and public sectors in workplaces of 10 or more; furthermore, Quebec has recently tabled legislation to further strengthen its pay equity law.

I think all Members of this hon. House, and in particular our female Members, would certainly be strongly supportive of seeing such legislation and would strongly encourage government to do so.

The Hay Group added that all Canadian provinces and territories also have human rights legislation which prohibits discrimination in employment generally, and which, in the absence of or in addition to pay equity legislation, can be a tool for addressing pay discrimination. While pay equity is not difficult to understand in theory, it is a challenge to implement in practice because it involves a major shift in value judgements. If work dominated by women has been underpaid because it has been unfairly undervalued, than a major shift in values is warranted, even if getting there is difficult.

That's why I'm so very pleased that the Member from St. John's Centre brought this motion forward to the House today, because it is absolutely critical and essential that we continue to fight the good fight until pay equity is achieved for the women of Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker. As the previous speakers have said before me here today, we represent over 50 per cent of the population; 51 per cent of the population in Newfoundland and Labrador, yet we are grossly underpaid. Again, it's not about the fact that we are women. It's about the fact that we are equally intelligent, equally capable. We're doing the same job and we, of course, deserve to be paid the same rate of pay.

I'm quickly running out of time, so I'm not going to have a lot to talk about – a lot of time left. So I'm going to focus a little bit on the Quebec *Pay Equity Act* as I finish because that legislation is divided into parts, with the first part applying to enterprises of 100 or more employees; the second part applies to enterprises with 50 to 100 employees; and then the third part applies to enterprises with less than 50.

It provides for the creation of sector based, pay equity committees. It requires the identification of predominantly female job classes and predominantly male job classes. It establishes job class value determination methods which must take into account required qualifications, responsibilities, effort required and the conditions under which the work is performed.

It goes into great deal about how job class evaluation much be done. It then lays out the terms and conditions of payments of compensation adjustments. In terms of looking at adjustments to compensation, they have it spread out over a period of four years.

This is a very progressive act. It certainly would have major implications for enterprises. If we were to look at introducing similar legislation, it could only be done with consultation with employers on the implications but we do strongly feel it's something that needs to be done. We need to address the inequities that have taken place in our province. We need strong legislation to ensure that these inequities stop and that women are seen for the real value they offer to the workplace.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour.

MR. BYRNE: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The requirement that the employer not establish or maintain a difference between the pay paid to female and male employees for performing work of equal or comparable value. That is pay equity.

Such a very simple, such a very straightforward and such a fair-minded principle; yet, achieving it is complex and difficult. That's what this motion seems to seek out, a way forward to make the difficult seem natural. That is why, Mr. Speaker, as reflected by the Minister of Finance and the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, we're very, very delighted to again report that the Liberal Party of Newfoundland and Labrador and its caucus will indeed be supporting this particular private Member's motion.

I want to say a very special thank you to its mover. It would be easy to say that this is day one of a day forward, but that would not be correct. In fact, this foundation was laid not only by the courage and the convictions of the Member for St. John's Centre and the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi, but for women who have served this House not only today on this side of the aisle, but on that side of the aisle, and historically since Confederation and even before. Today is not day one. Today is yet just another day in a very long fight, but I think today is a pivotal day, it is a special day, and it is an important day, because today the House is seized on this issue – it is seized exclusively on this issue.

And so, I give thanks that we have courageous, courageous parliamentarians before us, courageous leadership before us from both sides of this House. I am delighted that it appears a consensus is developing that this private Member's motion will indeed be supported and supported unanimously. Achieving pay equity in Newfoundland and Labrador will soon become a commitment of this House. This is a significant

undertaking, with complex processes and factors that obviously need to be considered.

Mr. Speaker, the mover, the Member for St. John's Centre, did indeed question or raise a concern that perhaps there may be an amendment that may be brought forward. There may be an attempt to see if there could be somewhat of a manipulation. I understand where the Member was coming from, and I can report to the Member and to this House that from this bench, from this side, no such amendment will be forwarded. In fact, the simplicity of this language –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BYRNE: – the language of the motion itself, in its straightforward simplicity, its directness and its sincerity I think deserves to be debated and vetted out on its specific merits.

In fact, the hon. Member who moved the motion and as reflected by the Minister of Finance, who spoke earlier, the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, one of the most courageous leaders that I have known in my political career, we all are seized with the reality that this is a complex issue. In fact, I listened very intently this morning to the mover appearing a provincial-wide broadcast – I believe it was province wide – and she did reflect on the fact how straightforward and honest and important and essential pay equity is, but how complex achieving the solution can be.

I cannot be anything but moved, that if we come forward and deal with this issue with that kind of honesty, working together in common cause, we don't have to dwell on the problem. We can dwell on the solution and the end result.

I can report to this House, just as there are many complex processes and factors that need to be considered, they are already being considered. A significant amount of research and analysis and consultations will obviously, as flows from the motion itself – obviously a significant level of consultation will definitely be required in order to provide options for proposals that provide a sufficient and relevant evidence base to move forward. That process is already started.

As Minister of Labour, I have already begun a cross-jurisdictional research effort; it is critical that we understand what other provinces and comparable jurisdictions are doing, to take from that best practices. But at the end of the day, it is Newfoundland and Labrador which will decide its own destiny. We will look at what has been achieved elsewhere and where there is room for improvement here at home. I'd like to take a moment to briefly explain the current circumstances in other jurisdictions. I know that there has already been some effort and energy put into this, but I really do think it's very important.

As the motion read, this is the start of a process, but an essential process. Pay equity for the federal public service is currently governed, as we know, by the requirements of the *Canadian Human Rights Act* and the *Equal Wages Guidelines, 1986*. In the federal sector, the *Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act* was introduced in February of 2009 as part of an omnibus budget implementation legislation and passed, but interestingly enough has not yet come into force. That was well over eight years ago.

The federal government has indicated a commitment to pay equity legislation and has established a committee who submitted a report to this effect on the subject in June of 2016. The federal government responded to that report in October of last year with a commitment to explore a new pay equity system and to bring forward proactive legislation by 2018. In addition to the work the federal government is doing, six of the 10 provinces have already enacted specific pay equity legislation. These include the Maritime Provinces, our neighbours; all of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island are governed by some form of pay equity legislation.

Ontario, Quebec and Manitoba also provide such protections. In Newfoundland and Labrador, we do not yet have specific pay equity legislation but we do have pay equity policies for the public sector. The same is true for Saskatchewan and British Columbia. For the most part, almost all of these policies and pieces of legislation apply strictly to the public sector.

In Newfoundland and Labrador the provincial government uses, as we're aware, the JES or Job Evaluation System for the public sector consisting of job factor descriptions and rating scales. It's meant to be gender neutral, pay equity compliant and equally applicable to all positions within government for the purposes of determining relative job values.

Government also reached pay equity agreements within the health care sector and with Newfoundland Hydro in 1990, I understand, with the Nurses' Union and Allied Health Professionals in '95, and again in 1996 government reached a pay equity agreement with NAPE for the general public service. These agreements occurred without legislative intervention at that time, which at the time marked the series of discussions as virtually unique within the pay equity field.

We know what we all want. That motion speaks to this. What we need to know is the best way forward. With the right information, we can explore options that identify specific feasible and measurable steps we can take to help to achieve pay equity, but it's work we need to do, Mr. Speaker.

According to Statistics Canada and their most recent data, as we are well aware by the information conveyed already in the House, women working full time in this country earn inexplicably about 74 cents for every dollar that full-time male workers earn. The numbers show this pay gap exists in every province and all across major occupational groups.

In 2015, women in this province made up 49.5 per cent of the workforce; however, they are overrepresented in low-wage jobs and precarious employment. Women make up 66 per cent of all minimum-wage workers in the province and 67 per cent of all workers. It is why I am very, very pleased to have taken the proactive step with my colleagues to introduce a 50 cent wage increase for minimum-wage workers in 2017; 25 cents taking effect on April 1 and a further 25 cent increase on October 1 of 2017 for a 50 cent increase for minimum-wage workers in this calendar year alone.

Then, in subsequent years, as our consultations evolve, we are working on a strategy and a

formula to be able to advance minimum wage through an economic indicator. I can say that during the course of those consultations that I've already undertaken, while they're still underway and we won't advance the outcome without receiving input from all stakeholders, there is a strong, strong desire for an indexed minimum wage.

In my own department, the Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour, we support many services that directly or indirectly help address the existing pay inequities. We offer a full range of inclusive services to respond to the training and employment needs of all residents, especially including women. These services include career planning, resume and cover letter writing assistance, labour market information, job search guidance and much, much more than just that. All residents can assess these services through our many offices.

The department also provides funding to numerous organizations. I think this is particularly pertinent. We provide support to numerous organizations that support women in the workforce and do a lot of great work in the area of pay equity.

One of the major organizations we support, as has been mentioned already, the Office to Advance Women Apprentices. This office helps women secure apprenticeships and employment in skilled trades. Women are under-represented in these groups. It is our intention; it is our steadfast commitment that we will even that playing field. This office also helps women to negotiate wage subsidies and administers wage subsidy agreements with employers.

The department also provides funding to the Newfoundland and Labrador Organization of Women Entrepreneurs. This organization helps women start their own businesses. Women have proven time and time again, anecdotally and statistically, to be the job drivers of today and the future when it comes to entrepreneurship.

The Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour also provides funding to the Women in Resource Development Corporation, which provides women with individualized assessments and customized supports to help women secure employment in trades and

technology. Across the province, the corporation provides career counselling and employment assistance services for women who want to progress in these fields.

These services include everything from community-based information sessions, to industry meetings and presentations, to leadership skills development, to doing whatever it takes. The corporation also provides a wide variety of consultation and professional development workshops to help employers recruit and retain women. They help employers to set up a career fair, or link them directly to qualified women for positions they need to fill.

Another organization that our department funds is Women in Science and Engineering. This is meant for young women, students, and provides student summer employment. It is open to female high school students in Newfoundland and Labrador and gives them real work experience in science and engineering, and provides what I think is what's most important, a platform of confidence to excel in science and engineering. That is something that is a must.

These organizations help to address pay equity in part by encouraging and supporting women working in fields typically dominated by men. Our government recognizes that women can and will play a bigger role in these fields, such as the skills trades.

So, as we go forward, Mr. Speaker, we can talk more about the many, many aspects of what is being done. We can talk – and this is what is most important about what needs to be done in the future, but what we can indeed celebrate with each other is what we're doing right now, and that is building a consensus that pay equity is an essential component of our 21st century world.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I have to say, it is more than a pleasure to stand here today on International Women's Day and to discuss something as important as pay equity. Now that we have the position of all three parties public here in the House, it makes it even more important and more of a pleasure to be doing this. I don't think we can call this a debate anymore. I think it's a discussion of why we need pay equity and why we're going to move forward and what's essential to pay equity.

If there's anything that my colleague, the MHA for Corner Brook and the Minister of Labour – if there's anything he said that was the ultimate truth it is that this is not day one, but for more than the reasons that he mentioned.

In 1908, at the turn of the 20th century – we're now 17 years into the 21st – there was a march in New York City. Fifteen thousand women marched through New York City demanding shorter hours, better pay and voting rights. So, 109 years ago.

Something else we heard here today, and it was my colleague from St. John's Centre who mentioned this point – she was quoting from an expert there – saying that at the rate we're going, closing the gender pay gap will take 170 years. I think actually he has overestimated how positive it's going to be. I think it's going to take more than 170 years, considering what happened 109 years ago.

In 1911, three years after that march in New York City, we had – there was a major, tragic fire in New York City. It was called the Triangle Fire. It took the lives of more than 140 working women, most of them Italian and Jewish immigrants, and that event really marked a real movement forward with regard to the working conditions and the labour legislation that was needed in the United States. It became a real focus. So in 1911, that's when you saw the beginning of the Bread and Roses campaign.

The Bread and Roses campaign, the desire to bring both pay equity as well as a good life to women is something that has been going on for well over a hundred years. It took decades after the Industrial Revolution highlight before this started to happen. But it was major that the equality for women that was being asked for back then was rooted in women being paid

labourers who were working in the most awful working conditions and who were working for a pittance.

That's why we're here today, and that's why this pay equity legislation is so important. And that's why I'm so happy that we did not make a political issue of this, in terms of a partisan political issue, but that we saw it as something that was really important for the people and for the women of Newfoundland and Labrador. So I am proud to be standing in this Legislature today.

Over lunch, I was at the IWD luncheon held by the Public Service Alliance of Canada every year and I was talking to Robyn Benson, who is the national president. In her speech to people at the luncheon – there were hundreds there, by the way – in her speech, one of the things she highlighted was pay equity. So I told her what we were doing here today and she was so pleased. I think her wish is that we move things more quickly than has happened in Ottawa, where you have legislation on the table, but it's not finalized, and as she said in her speech today, justice delayed is justice denied. So I'm hoping and I'm pleading with us that as we stand here today and make this decision that we will move forward quickly.

I understand what the minister is saying, there is a lot to getting pay equity in place but a lot of the work has now been done. I think that my colleague for St. John's Centre will speak to that again when she closes the debate today. We have to realize that we don't have to reinvent the wheel now. Blueprints have been put in place how to do the assessments of work. How to put pay equity in place is now something that's no longer a secret how to do it. The blueprint is there; the pathway has been created by others. And, yes, there may be some things that may be particular to our province, but I doubt it. It's a pretty universal issue that we're dealing with and I'm just extremely happy that we are dealing with it.

Now, where did it come from? Why are we where we are? This may seem obvious, but I think it's important to talk about it. The division of labour that became in the paid labour force is something that developed from the division of labour on a domestic level, before the Industrial

Revolution, that there was a division of labour for women and men.

One of the things that happened, as women came into the paid labour force, is that women were doing work that really was – they were being paid for it, but it was really the kind of work that they were doing at home. So women took care of their children, they took care of their men in the home and when they moved out into society, they did that as well. They took care of them in health care. They took care of men in war. Women went to the war as nurses and as health professionals to take care of the men who fought in the war.

Women taught in the home, then they went out into society and they taught and they became teachers. The majority were teachers, just like the majority today are still teachers. The majority in the health care professions are still women. The same thing with personal care which is related to health care, women were continuing to do outside the home what they did in the home and because what they did in the home wasn't valued as having an economic contribution, then what they did outside the home wasn't valued either. And so you have what was described by my colleague for Cape La Hune – are you still Cape La Hune?

MS. PERRY: (Inaudible.)

MS. MICHAEL: Yes.

Where she herself had the experience of working with men, and she and the women who worked in the situation earned half the amount the men earned simply because they were women. Well, that was because women's work is not valued. And that's what's at the basis of the pay equity issue: not valuing work that's done primarily by women.

There are two ways of getting at it. One way is to get women into higher paying jobs in areas that have been male dominated. I was glad to hear the Minister of Labour talking about Women in Resource Development Corporation, because I was the first executive director of WRDC. I'm so proud of the fact that the work we started back – well, it was prior to 1999, but around 1997 the committee started its work. The

work that started then is still going on. I'm very, very proud of that.

That's one way to get pay equity for women, by getting women into higher paying jobs, and it's good. And there are many women, for example, who go through the programs that have been sponsored by Women in Resource Development and by the College of the North Atlantic, and they do want to go on in areas that have been traditionally male dominated.

I keep bumping into women all over the province who remember doing the orientation to trades and technology program. A lot of them are in trades and technology now, but a lot of them are not. They are in jobs that they've chosen to go into, but the important point is because they did the training, they're probably in jobs that are much more better paying than they would have been in if they hadn't done that training.

So that's one way to do it. That's one way to up the money that women are making, that's one way to narrow the gender pay gap, is to do it that way, to get women to open up doors in areas which are high-paying areas and getting women into them. And that should happen, that is happening, and it needs to happen more and more.

One of the things, for example, that WRDC was really successful in doing was getting the whole discussion around women's employment into the oil and gas industry in this province. It happened during the White Rose environmental assessment, and there was a commission set up to review the first White Rose Project. WRDC, with myself and one other person, Joyce Hancock, actually, sat in front of the commissioner and talked about the need for women to be in that industry, in the jobs that have been male dominated. A very strong recommendation came from the commissioner with regard to women's employment and having plans for women's employment in those areas.

That has become now a standard. It's happening more and more and more in the province. I understand that even through the Women's Policy Office there is work going on directly with companies around having women's employment plans. So that's one way.

But not all women want to go into trades and technology. Not all women want to go into these areas, some of the areas which have been dominated by men. So we need to look at where women have been working traditionally where they've been the dominate figures in the position.

So as I've mentioned, in the health care system, in the educational system, in retail, for example. A lot of people – the majority that I've met – who are nurses or teachers or working in exciting retail positions or in cultural industries, et cetera, they love what they're doing and they want to stay there, but they also have to be paid for what they're doing.

We look at somebody – I couldn't do some jobs that I see some people do. Some of the office work, for example, that needs to be done in a business. I wouldn't be satisfied doing it, but there are people who are. They've been traditionally women and we have underpaid them.

So what we have to do in order to get full pay equity, if we're talking about narrowing the gender pay gap, if that's what we're talking about, then we have to look at all of those aspects. It's not just one; it's not just the other.

I won't go into the details that some of my colleagues have gone into with regard to the mechanics of how that happens; that's been worked out. It's not hard to do anymore because most of the jobs now that exist have been assessed by somebody. So you do have the breakdown done. You do now know how to evaluate the work. We don't have to do that anymore. It has been done. It was the labour movement, as my colleague pointed out earlier; it was the labour movement in particular that pushed this.

I remember back in the 1990s, I was working in Toronto and one of the organizations I was working with was working with labour and with the National Action Committee on the Status of Women around pay equity. That was back in the 1990s. One of the unions that we worked very closely with at that time was the Public Service Alliance of Canada. They were quite involved in that issue. And they're still involved in it and still demanding of the federal government that it

finally put the legislation in place. It's out there, but it's not in place yet.

So it is wonderful. And we have to be open to all the ways in which we have to put policies and programs in place to ensure that women's work is no longer women's work, that it is work. That it is work that has a value to it and we objectively evaluate all work and make sure whether it's a man or a woman who's doing the job that's being evaluated, that they're being paid fairly, that they're being paid justly. That's how we are going to get to the whole point of having gender equity when it comes to how people are paid.

We have a few provinces already moving this way in Canada. Let us hope we can speed up this process. Let us hope by us making this decision here today that we'll inspire a sister province, maybe another province in Atlantic Canada to say Newfoundland and Labrador is doing it, we can do it. This is how we might get to a place where we have equality in pay by 170 years down the road.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burin – Grand Bank.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll commence my remarks today by wishing my fellow female Members of this hon. House a rewarding, happy International Women's Day.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. HALEY: And though most would agree that women in Canada and indeed in our own province of Newfoundland and Labrador have some ways to go before we can claim we live in a truly gender-equal society, today in particular we should all take time to think about those areas of the world where females can only dream of having the freedoms and opportunities we have here in our province.

All struggles for basic human rights, whether based on gender or any other factor, are struggles for all of humanity. None of us can ever claim to be free while others are chained and bounded by sexism, racism or any of the dozens of other isms that pollute the thinking of way too many, Mr. Speaker. Let's work together to make sure that one day there will be no need for an International Women's Day, because gender equality will be a given.

Last week in this hon. House we came together to share our opinions on how to attract more women into leadership roles and into politics. Before I lend my thoughts on wage equality for women, I want to reflect on equality for women in general, especially in politics, and since time constraints prevented me from doing so last week.

I found it very interesting to learn that in 1930 only 34 women have been elected to this hon. House, Mr. Speaker. In the 85 years since Lady Helena Squires was elected as our first female representative, right up to the 2015 election, less than three dozen women have been afforded the privilege of having a voice in the nation – because that's what we were at the time, Mr. Speaker, a nation – and now the province's Legislature.

There are those who would argue that we should expect progress in this area to be slow; that we should accept a slow evolution to increased female representation in this hon. House, Mr. Speaker. After all, we have grown from one female representative in 1930 to 10 of us here today. That sounds like progress to some; 10 of us, one-quarter of the total representation in this hon. House, despite the fact we are more than half the population. But it took us 85 years to get to this point.

We cannot, and we will not wait another 85 years, which would put us at the year 2100 before we can claim equality. Mr. Speaker, we cannot wait until the next century before we can realize the dream of equal voice, the dream of the women who participated in the Daughters of the Vote session held here recently. There has been progress; there is no doubt about it. We've seen our first female premier; we've seen women taking on Cabinet positions where they have and continue to thrive. As females, we

have proved time and time again we are up to the task, Mr. Speaker.

We have three female Cabinet ministers: the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Natural Resources and the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development who are all up to the task. The Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair, our Deputy Speaker, is definitely up to the task. In listening to the Member for Harbour Grace – Port de Grave and the Member for Harbour Main represent the interests of their constituents of this House during the past year I know they, too, are up to the task.

And though of course I do not always agree with the Members on the opposite side of this House, I have no reservation in saying the three female Members opposite are also up to the task, Mr. Speaker. I humbly submit that, as Government Whip, I, too, am up to the task.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. HALEY: Mr. Speaker, we are ready. Women are ready for an equal voice. That is not to imply that every female out there will offer herself for public office next election. Just as with men, there are many valuable roles for women to play in society, some of them leadership roles, some not: CEOs and managers, assembly-line workers and homecare providers, teachers and nurses. Not everyone, neither male nor female, has a desire to come into this hon. House and do what we do. The vast majority of people will not choose this path, and that's perfectly okay.

Last week's resolution was not about convincing women that they should be offering themselves for public office. It was about creating an atmosphere where women who are interested are not stymied by obstacles that males do not have to worry about. It was about creating a consciousness in the general population that women have something to offer, that if given the chance, we can do the job, Mr. Speaker.

I suppose, compared to some, I was lucky to have grown up in an environment where politics was very important and where I was always invited to participate. Even before hitting my teenage years, I was side by side with my late grandfather putting up campaign posters to

support our local candidate. I was just 14 years old when I attended my first convention, Mr. Speaker, and I haven't missed a provincial one since.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. HALEY: My mother blazed the trail for me when she took on the role of deputy mayor in my hometown in the 1980s – another way in which she has been a great role model, Mr. Speaker.

I willingly took on leadership roles with provincial and federal associations and if that wasn't emersion enough, I spent eight years as special assistant to Minister Judy Foote. It was that emersion in politics that gave me the confidence to seek office in the last two provincial elections.

I would never suggest I was destined to be an elected official. Destiny does not earn us a seat in this hon. House, Mr. Speaker. Rather, an atmosphere that nurtures confidence, an atmosphere that allows you to grow as a person; a society that can see beyond skin colour and ethnic background, beyond religion and dozens of other inconsequential variables, including gender.

Those are the things that help level the playing field so that all, including women, who feel they have something to offer will do so and will be given due consideration when the populous heads to the polls to cast their votes.

When we have true equality, it won't be measured by an assembly of 40 being comprised of exactly 20 males and exactly 20 females, Mr. Speaker. It will be measured by a society where everyone feels free to offer himself or herself for office and where the electorate votes for the best candidate, period.

Mr. Speaker, I submit that if two heads are better than one, then two halves are also better than one, and the half of us who are female are ready to prove that point. After much discussion and debate, we resolve to do what we can to attract more women to leadership and political roles. A very positive move, for sure, Mr. Speaker. I was proud to support that resolution; hopefully, it

will pay dividends and we will see positive results as we move forward.

For any female who enters into this field, throws her hat into the ring as it were and gets elected to represent her district here in the House of Assembly, she can be certain that the amount of compensation she receives, her salary, will be the same as that of any of her male counterparts, Mr. Speaker.

I represent the good people of the District of Burin – Grand Bank and I get paid the same salary as my counterpart representing Placentia West – Bellevue, or any other of my male colleagues in this hon. House, Mr. Speaker, and that's how it should be.

A female teacher with the same experience and educational background as a male teacher will receive the same salary in our province. Equal pay for equal work. When work can be viewed fairly, objectively, the story on pay equity is encouraging, Mr. Speaker. It's when subjectivity creeps into the thinking that things go askew. It's then we see disparity.

When we look at the overall picture of wages in our province, and indeed our country, there is reason for concern. Let's consider Canada as a whole. Whenever we look at Canada on a global scale we ooze pride, Mr. Speaker. There is no area when we are not at the top or near the top when it comes to progressive thinking and development, or so we are prone to think.

Let's consider this; the World Economic Forum, when it conducted a recent study on gender rankings, put Canada at a distant and dismal 30th place. Yes, 30th, not 3rd, 30th. Ironically, though there has been some progress over the years, the gap is still quite significant among the younger more educated in our society.

One would think that in an enlightened society there would be no noticeable gap between young educated males and young educated females, Mr. Speaker. From this, I gather it takes longer for professional females starting out to prove themselves than it does professional males at the same age.

On average, women in Newfoundland and Labrador are earning only 83 per cent that of

males. If we omit professions such as teaching, where pay equity is already a reality, then obviously there are many areas in which the gap is much wider. That is totally unacceptable, Mr. Speaker. How can we talk about equality for women while leaving something as basic as pay equity on the back burner?

Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding that six provinces have such legislation at the present time. Newfoundland and Labrador is one of the three provinces that has a framework for pay equity and has resulted in closing the gap in the public sector. That was certainly an important step along the way, that was progress, but we have to ask ourselves if that's good enough. I think, Mr. Speaker, the obvious answer is no.

The women of this province who fought to get women the right to vote, they were trailblazers. Without their determination, 10 of us would not be here today, Mr. Speaker. We are indebted to them for this opportunity to come forward and offer ourselves to contribute to the public good.

In the intervening years since being granted a vote in 1925, we have seen progress for women. There is no doubt about that, Mr. Speaker, but, unfortunately, there remains adherence of that regressive thinking that has kept women as a whole from reaching true equality.

Mr. Speaker, fields that were once considered exclusively male are finally opening doors to females. Today we see a steadily increasing number of female welders, carpenters, heavy equipment operators, mechanics, and the list goes on and on. These are often good paying jobs and we have to ensure that females receive the same compensation as their male counterparts, Mr. Speaker. Again, equal pay for equal work.

In the business world, females also have much catching up to do. Our corporations are top-heavy with male executives while females have been expected to content themselves with lower paying positions. When we learn that only two of Canada's 100 highest-earning CEOs are female, we know we have work to do, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand in support of today's private Member's motion on pay equity.

Thank you so much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm pleased to have a chance to speak to this private Member's motion today on what is a significant day, International Women's Day. I'm pleased to join with I think every Member of the House of Assembly in supporting this motion, and that's a good thing. It's a good thing.

I want to build on some of the comments that were made previously by my colleague who spoke to this motion today, the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune. I know some Members opposite may not appreciate the history and the context that I want to provide, but to the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour's comments, this is an evolution. I think it's important to look at where we are and look at where we're going, but also reflect on our paths and what's brought us to this point today.

We are a party that has long supported pay equity, and has taken numerous steps over time to further address pay equity. I think actually taking the step of legislation, which is what is being proposed here today, is the next logical step in the evolution and one that we are certainly prepared to support. I was pleased to hear the Minister of Finance stand today and make such a commitment. So that's all positive.

I'd like to look back to the Peckford administration, which took on pay equity in 1988. And then look at some of the reversals that happened since, and then some progress that was made again under the Williams government in 2006.

There was an issue that resulted in a judgement by the Supreme Court of Canada in 2004, a case known as Newfoundland Treasury Board v NAPE 2004. I'd like to use that judgement to describe what transpired because it captures the situation quite effectively.

Paragraph 30 of the judgement sets the context. “Pay equity has been one of the most difficult and controversial workplace issues of our times. There is no doubt that in the 1980s women hospital workers in Newfoundland and Labrador (and elsewhere) were being paid less than men for work of equal value. By 1988, it had become a significant collective bargaining issue between the provincial government and the public sector unions.”

Paragraph 4 in that judgement lays out further history. “The collective agreements that had been in force between the government and the public sector unions for a number of years included a prohibition against discrimination on the ground of sex (art. 4.01). Despite this provision, the parties had negotiated collective agreements from year to year which, they eventually acknowledged, paid female-dominated work classifications less than was paid to male-dominated classifications for work of equal value. There had been in existence, the government agreed on June 24, 1988, systemic discrimination. The resulting Pay Equity Agreement between the government and the major public sector unions, including the appellant, did not itself achieve pay equity, but laid out a process and methodology for its implementation. The intention was to begin the pay equity process in the hospital sector and in Newfoundland Hydro, but eventually to ‘bring in pay equity in all segments’ of the provincial public service.”

Then there’s paragraph 39. It quotes the purpose of the agreement, which was “To achieve pay equity by redressing systemic gender discrimination in compensation for work performed by employees in female dominated classes within the bargaining units represented by AAHP, IBEW, CUPE, NAPE and NLNU, and whose members are employees covered by *The Public Service (Collective Bargaining) Act, 1973.*”

I could go on, and I know my time is limited, so I won’t on this particular point but this judgement is a significant one. And something else happened in 1991. There was a tough budget delivered by the government of the day and Dr. Hubert Kitchen was the Finance Minister under Clyde Wells, and the budget announced the layoff of 1,300 permanent

employees, 350 part-time employees, 350 seasonal hires, the elimination of 500 vacant positions, a wage freeze, hospital beds were closed, there were cuts to grants across government, and the economy was thrown into turmoil, lots of cuts.

The reason I point that out is that the budget speech that year in 1991 also said the following: “Closely related to Government’s ability to fund general salary increases is the matter of our ability to fund pay equity in the public sector. If Government funds the retroactive payments required under the current pay equity agreement in the health sector” – the one I was referencing a moment ago – “it will have little choice but to close an even greater number of hospital beds, resulting in substantially more layoffs in the health sector.

“Instead, Government has chosen to recognize the principle of pay equity, but will not make it retroactive. Government is committed to phasing in the pay equity adjustments over a maximum of five years beginning at the time final pay equity wage adjustments are determined.”

Then there came Bill 16, the *Public Sector Restraint Act*, and the first two sections of clause 9 of that bill stated: “Notwithstanding the terms and conditions of a pay equity agreement contained in a collective agreement or added by agreement to an existing collective agreement, no pay equity agreement shall contain a provision which implements that pay equity agreement retroactively.” It goes on to say: “Where there is a provision in any pay equity agreement which provides that the pay equity agreement shall be implemented retroactively, that provision is void.”

So that’s significant. And there was the Supreme Court statement, and in paragraph 31 it said: “The Pay Equity Agreement signed on June 24, 1988 was a major achievement. No doubt it was brought by the public sector unions with concessions on other fronts. Progress on such an important issue, once achieved, should not be lightly set aside. Yet, the effect of the *Public Sector Restraint Act* was not only to shift the start of the provincial government’s pay equity adjustments from 1988 to 1991, but to eliminate any liability for amounts otherwise payable to the underpaid female hospital workers in respect

of the three fiscal years ending March 31, 1991.” It goes on to talk about the impact on those workers.

Paragraph 40 says: “The female hospital workers were being told that they did not deserve equal pay, despite making a contribution of equal value.” And the judgement described why that was so significant. It says: “Work is one of the most fundamental aspects in a person’s life, providing the individual with a means of financial support and, as importantly, a contributing role in society. A person’s employment is an essential component of his or her sense of identity, self-worth and emotional well-being. Accordingly, the conditions in which a person works are highly significant in shaping the whole compendium of psychological, emotional and physical elements of a person’s dignity and self-respect.”

There are several other paragraphs in that judgement that I think are significant, but in the interest of time I’ll move on. So was there a breach of the Charter? Well, paragraph 51 of the judgement said: I therefore conclude that both the trial judge and the Court of Appeal were correct to affirm the board’s unanimous finding of a breach of section 15.

So the question was whether this Charter right could be limited by a reasonable measure. In the end, the Supreme Court concluded yes. They permitted the breach because of the province’s financial crisis at the time. It was not a good day for women who were impacted.

A year after this judgement, on December 5, 2005 – so we’re getting closer to current day – an NDP Member of the Legislature, Randy Collins, asked a series of questions to Premier Williams about this very issue. This is what Williams said at the time: Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the hon. Member that this government has the same concerns that he has, that this is considered to be a very grave issue in my personal opinion, and in the opinion of many Members of Cabinet and caucus in this particular government.

This is a black mark on this province and on this government; quite frankly, something has to be done. And I can assure you, without disclosing any Cabinet confidence, many, many of our

Cabinet ministers are very anxious to see this matter resolved and want to see it resolved.

Our government is open to consideration of what we consider to be a reasonable settlement in this particular matter. Now, I know you cannot put a price on doing something that is right, and I accept that fully. But, by the same token, we have to come up with something that is affordable so that it does not compromise other social initiatives that government wants to do.

So, subsequent to this, Sharon King of the Association of Allied Health Professionals, Dave Reynolds of the Canadian Union of Public Employees, Bob Clarke of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 1615, Carol Ann Furlong of the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Public and Private Employees and Debbie Forward from the Newfoundland and Labrador Nurses Union wrote a letter to Premier Williams. In that letter they stated: “We ask that in keeping with your public comments, you consider making an ex gratia payment of \$24,000,000 to the Association of Allied Health Professionals,” CUPE, IBEW, NAPE “and the Nurses’ Union in recognition of the value of the sacrifices made by our Province’s public servants in 1988 to 1991.

“Their sacrifice improved Newfoundland and Labrador’s financial situation and now, as our economy flourishes, we are reaping the fruits of their labors. Such a gesture would heal the long festering wound which exists between the Government and its public servants and permit the forging of a new relationship based on mutual respect and recognition of the value of the work of our public servants.

“It is time for all parties to put the past behind us.”

So Premier Williams read that letter in the House in a Ministerial Statement over a decade ago on March 23, 2006. After reading the letter, Premier Williams made the following statement: “What an ex gratia payment would amount to is a tangible measure of solace for those whom the province considers to have suffered more than others by the necessary action it took in meeting the financial crisis of 1991.

“I am very proud and extremely pleased to announce in this hon. House today that our government will be fulfilling this request by union leadership and making the ex gratia payment of \$24 million.”

Mr. Speaker, it was the right thing to do at the time, and I’m proud that the government of the day did it. I was not in this House at the time; most Members here were not in the House at that time. But it represented another significant step forward.

Pay equity does have a cost, but failing to deliver pay equity has an even greater cost: the cost that all of us pay if we deny people fundamental justice and equality. Here today in this House of Assembly on International Women’s Day this is about justice; this is about equality.

There have been steps taken by governments in the past to address pay equity and to get us to a better place, but we still have a long way to go. We’re still not where we need to be, and there will be a significant cost in doing what’s right and what’s needed. But failing to do so has an even greater cost, it has an even greater cost to our people, and it has an even greater cost to our society. That’s why this debate we’re having here today, although it’s a debate of heated agreement, it is about justice, it is about fairness and it is about equality. While it’s important to reflect on where we’ve come from, now we can join together as Members of this House and say it’s time to take the next logical step. Some of the wrongs of the past have been righted, as I outlined today in the brief history I’ve just presented, but now we have an opportunity to make history and to not be the last jurisdiction in this country to implement pay equity legislation.

So I am pleased with the stance that the government is taking today. I think it would have been a difficult private Member’s motion to try to amend, but often on Private Members’ Day motions get amended and adjusted to perhaps make them more palatable to government or whatever the case may be. In this particular case, I applaud government for saying, you know what, we agree, and all parties agree, so we’re going to do it. Of course, the next logical question will be, well when? It can’t happen overnight.

Legislation, as we’ve discussed several times even in this sitting, already – legislation takes time. There are lots of things that – some take months, even years to develop. But I hope that government will act swiftly, with a sense of urgency, to bring in the legislation that will make Newfoundland and Labrador a leader when it comes to pay equity. The time is long overdue, but better late than never. This is the next logical step in the evolution, and here today on International Women’s Day, it’s an appropriate time to have that discussion and for all of us to be part of that conversation.

So I want to thank the Member for St. John’s Centre for bringing this issue forward. I know that in my time working with her inside and outside of this House, she’s for a long time been a champion of – not just pay equity, but a lot of issues that particularly affect women in our society. I commend her for that, and I commend government today for standing with all of us to say this is an issue that needs to be addressed. Let’s work together, let’s get the legislation in place, let’s show leadership on International Women’s Day and every day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for St. John’s Centre to close debate.

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

I’m happy to stand once again today to close the debate on the private Member’s motion asking government to start the process to enact pay equity legislation in the province. And it’s a good day; it’s a good day on many levels.

I would like to thank all those who spoke today. In particular the Minister of Finance, who is also the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women; the MHA for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune; the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour; my colleague, the Member for St. John’s East – Quidi Vidi; the Member for Burin – Grand Bank, and the Member for Mount Pearl North. I would like to thank everyone for

everything that I have learned today from all those who have spoken. It is a great day.

I would also like to thank the staff of the House of Assembly who work so hard and who sit through these hours and hours of debate, and do it with dedication. I would like to thank all those staff in our particular caucus office who helped work on this private Member's motion and who did great research so that we could bring the best information that we could possibly bring to the House.

I want to thank all the activists who have brought us to this point. As we all know in this House, that for women, for Aboriginal people, indigenous people, for racialized people, for people on the margins, for the LGBTQ community, for the people living with disabilities, that our rights are never given to us, they are hard won. We have to work so hard to get there.

I would like to thank all the activists, the incredible activists in the women's community, the incredible activists who are in women's groups, who are in equality seeking groups, the labour activists and the social justice groups. I would like to thank them for prodding, for teaching, for persisting and resisting, for bringing us to these points, for pushing us to do the right thing.

The federal Pay Equity Task Force released a final report in 2004, and the report – I only have half of it right here. It's quite a big report, Mr. Speaker, and it's called *Pay Equity: A New Approach to a Fundamental Right*. Now some people have talked about how complex pay equity is, and it is in some ways and it has been but really the blueprint is there for us. A number of jurisdictions have already enacted pay equity legislation, again some only for, exclusively for public sector workers, and some provinces for both the private sector and the public sector. So the blueprint is there for us.

There is a map as we begin our journey in this direction. There's also a special report of the Special Committee on Pay Equity, again from the federal jurisdiction, it's called: *It's Time To Act* and that came out in June 2016. So, again, there are lots of blueprints for us. There are blueprints for us in a number of provinces.

Mr. Speaker, Ontario, who has proudly and successfully practiced pay equity legislation, they have lots of information on their Pay Equity Ontario website. There's a great document here, it's a few pages long, and it's a question-and-answer document that really kind of simplifies things.

If anybody in their particular districts have some questions about pay equity, because sometimes it does seem complex, well there's a really great handy document right here. There's also a handy document from the Ontario Legislature on their website, and it says: Pay equity and equal pay, what is the difference? And really clearly explains the difference, because sometimes there's confusion about that.

So, Mr. Speaker, when I was preparing for this private Member's motion, I put up a Facebook page with Jenny Nolan, who works in my office, and she found a great cartoon that she attached to the Facebook page. And it's Wonder Woman. She's on top of a high, high building. She's on top of a skyscraper and she's leaning over that skyscraper, and she's holding on to Batman by one arm. She's holding on to him, and she's protecting Batman from falling and splatting on the ground. She says to Batman as she's holding on to his arm: by the way, is it true I still get paid 70 per cent of what you guys in the justice league get paid?

Well, Mr. Speaker, let's hope that we can take care of that. I would like to thank all the Wonder Women in my life, and I would like to thank all the Batmen in my life who are also aware that it's precarious for everybody in our community when we don't have justice and equality and fairness. So I look forward, I'd like to thank all the champions at the tables where decisions are being made. I believe there are champions on both sides of this House, champions for fairness and equality, and I would like to thank them for stepping up and for pushing as well.

I would like to thank what we have – my Member's motion said: Be it resolved that the House of Assembly urge government to start the process to enact pay equity legislation in the province. It's a little bit soft, Mr. Speaker, but just to let everyone in the House know that I am sure that we are all going to work really hard to ensure that there's a concrete plan and a timeline

so that this becomes a reality. That it doesn't just become wouldn't it be nice if we could do this, but that we are really committed to a concrete plan with a timeline, with the resources necessary to get to the point where we do have pay equity legislation covering both our public sector and our private sector in a way that's measured, that is also possible, particularly for the public sector – I think there's a lot of fears out there: Well, what would that mean?

Other jurisdictions have done it and they have done it in such a way that they work in concert with the private sector. This is a slow process in terms of once we have that legislation so that we can get there together.

I look forward to all of us working together on this because I believe that we can do this. I'd like to thank all the women the world over who dared to dreamed, who dared to believe in a more just and fair society for us all. I'd like to thank those wonder women and those batmen, thank you. We promised we won't drop you, but we need you also to be pushing on our behalf. We're willing to do our part in helping you stay afloat too.

In Eastern European countries on International Women's Day, men actually give women gifts. So I'd like to say that here in this House of Assembly where 75 per cent of you are male and where 75 per cent of you will probably vote on this particular motion, I hope that we can rely on your unanimous support; and, if so, on behalf of the women of Newfoundland and Labrador, I would like to pre-empt that by saying thank you for the big, fat, juicy gift and, tonight, I will be dancing and I hope tonight many of us will be dancing and celebrating what is a fair and just action that we took part in in the House here today.

Again, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): Is the House ready for the question?

All those in favour of the motion?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: This being Private Members' Day, the House is now adjourned until 1:30, tomorrow afternoon.