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HANSARD

*Speaker: Honourable Tom Osborne, MHA*

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

**MR. SPEAKER (Osborne):** Admit strangers.

Order, please!

I'd like to welcome to the Speaker's gallery today Zoey Davis and her mom Scottina Davis, and Michelle Clemens, the Principal of O'Donel High School who are joining us today for the reading of the Ministerial Statement.

Welcome.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** As well, to the Speaker's gallery today, I would like to welcome Janice and Rendell Drover of Upper Island Cove, and James and Valerie Mercer of Bishop's Cove who are present today for the reading of a Member's statement.

Welcome.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** To our public gallery today, we have Mr. John Baker and Mr. Fred Power, the subjects of a Member's statement, and joining them are members of their families.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** As well in the public gallery today, we have members of the Canadian Cancer Society. Matthew Piercey, CEO, Sharon Smith, Board Chair and Margot Reid who are present for the reading of a Ministerial Statement.

Welcome.

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

### Statements by Members

**MR. SPEAKER:** For Members' statements today, we have the Members for the Districts of Placentia West – Bellevue, Terra Nova, Cape St. Francis, Mount Pearl North, Bonavista and Mount Pearl – Southlands.

I understand the Member for Harbour Grace – Port de Grave has leave as well for a member's

statement. Is that correct? And the Member for Harbour Grace – Port de Grave.

The hon. the Member for Placentia West – Bellevue.

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

**MR. BROWNE:** Mr. Speaker, nearly 50 years ago, an act of tragedy was accompanied by an act of triumph. On a Marystown summer's day in June of 1967, then 9-year-old Fred Power lost control of his bicycle while going down a steep hill and went head first into a large boom truck.

Then fifteen-year-old John Baker witnessed the incident, and jumped in to carry Fred to his home, a distance of nearly 3,000 feet. Fred would end up being airlifted to St. John's undergoing major reconstructive surgery, having his jaw wired shut and spending over a year in hospital learning how to walk and talk all over again.

Now, some 50 years later, Fred has overcome his many struggles through determination, hard work and the support of his wife and two children. Next month he will graduate from the Heavy Equipment Operators Program. Ironically, the man who administered Fred's driver examination in Marystown was none other than John Baker, the same man who Fred credits with saving his life and having a lifelong impact on him.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in recognizing John's instant and life-saving action, which resulted in a second chance for his fellow man.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for the District of Terra Nova.

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

I rise in this hon. House to recognize a true Newfoundland and Labrador champion. At the age of 66 years, Bramwell Churchill has risen to the top of his game of golf and he has represented this province with pride and spirit.

Originally from Portugal Cove, Mr. Churchill now calls Port Blandford home, where he practises faithfully at the Terra Nova Golf Resort. Since 2002, Bramwell has focused his interests and his success on the Long Drive Division.

For 14 years, he has been a member of Team Canada and Bram has travelled extensively throughout Canada, United States, Jamaica, Mexico, Dominican Republic and the Caribbean. Among his long list of accomplishments, Bram is a three-time Quebec and Maritimes Senior Long Drive Champion; three-time Remax Senior Long Drive Canadian Champion; six-time Senior Long Drive Canadian Champion; and a three-time International World Senior Long Drive Champion.

He holds the Canadian Senior Long Drive distance record of 377 yards and his personal best is 400 yards, 6 inches. In August the *Downhome* magazine named Bram Churchill as Canada's Best Long Driver and a Golf Superstar.

Bravo to Bramwell Churchill for his sportsmanship and his mastery on the world stage of golf.

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

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

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

I rise today to honour the late Mr. Paddy Hickey of Outer Cove. Paddy, who passed away in January, had a long and interesting life. At the early age of eight, he worked with his father's fishing enterprise. As a teenager, he worked in a cod liver oil plant. At the age of 17, he became a truck driver at Fort Pepperell.

Aside from his five years working in the United States, Paddy spent his a lifetime in Outer Cove. With his wife Agnes, he operated a small grocery store which served as the favourite Sunday handout. Paddy spent 20 years of his career with Government House where he

personally assisted visiting dignitaries and royalty.

Paddy believed that time was a precious asset, a person's word represented an unbreakable bond and helping your neighbour was to be done without question. Visiting the sick and attending funerals was one's moral responsibility.

Paddy would have been 95 this past Saturday. He will be remembered by his family and friends with love and respect and will be missed. Paddy's gentle nature and soft smile will be forever present.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in honouring the late Mr. Paddy Hickey.

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

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

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

I rise in this hon. House today to recognize the Rotary Club of Waterford Valley and its work on the Waterford River. The Waterford River flows through Mount Pearl, St. John's and Paradise. The river has been a priority for the Rotary Club of Waterford Valley since it was founded in 1977.

Recently, the Rotary Club unveiled the club's completed mobile interpretive exhibit booth, featuring a specially prepared video designed to heighten the public's awareness of the river and the challenges it faces. The club is planning to have the booth on display in community buildings, schools and other public venues.

Spokesperson and long-time Rotarian Sandy Roche stated: "We want to make sure that the vitality of the river is maintained for future generations to enjoy. Key to achieving that goal is the commitment of, and cooperation amongst, the three municipal councils involved."

The three municipalities are coming together to implement a comprehensive baseline study of the river to determine what is affecting the river's long-term viability. The study is now underway and should be completed this summer.

Honourable Members of this House, please join me in thanking the Rotary Club of Waterford Valley for the tremendous work it's doing to protect the Waterford River.

Thank you.

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

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

**MR. KING:** Mr. Speaker, when life hands you lemons, some people choose to make lemonade. This statement couldn't be truer for the residents of Champney's West who just celebrated their 25th anniversary performances of their annual variety concert.

Started in 1992, as a way to lift community spirits in the wake of the cod moratorium, the Champney's West Recreation Committee and Friends have been performing for 25 years. Not just for their own community but for far and wide. This event which features a number of skits and musical performances, welcomes all to participate. Showing true community spirit in all they do, everyone from the community pitches in whether they're nine or 90.

In 1992, it cost a dollar for admission because nobody had any money. Today, it costs \$15, with the money invested back into the community.

On March 24 and 25, standing-room-only crowds packed the recreation hall. I was fortunate enough to attend on the 24th and certainly wasn't disappointed. In fact, I was recruited to hand out diplomas during the prom skit and cut loose to "Footloose" as we exited the stage.

To all those who have contributed to making this event successful year after year, I say bravo.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for District of Mount Pearl – Southlands.

**MR. LANE:** Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to stand in this hon. House to recognize the

tremendous success which was the 35th Annual Frosty Festival in the City of Mount Pearl.

Once Again, this year's festival included various activities for citizens of all ages and interests, including: an opening extravaganza The Circle of Life by TaDa! Events; an outdoor parade of lights; a sold-out concert at the Glacier, featuring Newfoundland's own Shanneyganock, along with The Fables and Celtic Connection; two community breakfasts; an Irish pub night; a lip sync contest; a seniors' bingo; a jiggs' dinner and variety show; a dinner theatre with Spirit of NL; and a Battle of the Brains trivia night, just to name a few.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure you can appreciate any festival of this magnitude would not be possible were it not for the hard work and co-operation of a number of community partners. I would therefore ask all Members of this hon. House to join me in congratulating the City of Mount Pearl, the Frosty Festival Board of Directors, the various community groups and organization, the corporate sponsors and all of the community-minded volunteers who contributed to the great success story which was Frosty Festival 2017.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Harbour Grace –Port de Grave.

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

Thank you to my colleagues for this leave. Today I would like to recognize two first-time authors from the District of Harbour Grace – Port de Grave: Mrs. Janice Drove of Upper Island Cove and Mr. James Mercer of Bishops Cove.

Janice wrote a book *Miracles Happen*, a story of a tragic event that happened in Harbour Grace in 2010. On August 13, her husband Rendell Drover, a well-known fisherman in the community, was injured in an industrial accident that nearly claimed his life.

Janice recalls in detail the weeks and months that followed. Throughout his recovery, Rendell underwent a series of dangerous medical

procedures and lived. There was a recent community book launch in Upper Island Cove, and the Drover family dedicated book proceeds to the Children's Wish.

James Mercer's book also features a true life event, about his great-grandfather and namesake, James Eliol Mercer, who was brutally murdered in 1883. He died under mysterious circumstances, which occurred just before his 30th birthday while en route to Harbour Grace.

The story of his great-grandfather has withstood the test of time, and James is pleased to share with the readers the factual and heart-breaking details of the event, which has been told and retold for over a century in the community of Upper Island Cove.

Colleagues, please join me in congratulations.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Statements by Ministers.

#### Statements by Ministers

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

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

Mr. Speaker, next week, Canadians will celebrate the 35th anniversary of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Constitutionally enshrined in 1982 under the government of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, the Charter guarantees rights to all Canadians, such as democratic rights like the right to vote, legal rights like the right to life, liberty and security of the person, equality rights to ensure equal protection and benefit of the law without discrimination, among others.

As Minister of Justice and Public Safety, and the Attorney General, I consider myself an ambassador of the Charter. Part of my duty is to ensure that the rights of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are protected, and that the government of this province respects the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in all that it does.

Mr. Speaker, I am committed to ensuring that the system of justice here is fair and accessible and that it respects and promotes the Charter.

Where would this country be on matters such as same-sex marriage, access to abortion services, or more recently, medical assistance in dying without the Charter?

In our first year of government, we have already endorsed Charter values. For example, with the passing of the Access to Abortion Services Act, we ensured individuals can attain respectful and private access to legal health services while respecting the rights of others to protest or express dissent.

The Charter continues to actively shape the design and interpretation of our laws and policies and it protects our fundamental freedoms. In this 35th anniversary year, I believe it is especially important to engage people in this province on the role the Charter plays in their lives. To that end, we'll be engaging with people across the province, on social media to start a dialogue about the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We encourage you to participate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement today. We join with government in celebrating the 35th anniversary of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, a document and a new way forward for Canada, composed of fundamental freedoms, democratic rights, mobility rights, legal rights, equality rights as well as language rights.

While the *Charter* was enshrined 35 years ago, it remains a living document that continues to grow and adjust to the needs and expectations of Canadians. A recent example of this, Mr. Speaker, is the *R. v. Jordan* case – one that we've discussed here in the House many times. A decision of the Supreme Court of Canada which rejected the traditional framework used to determine whether an accused was tried within a reasonable time under the *Charter* and have been replaced now with fixed timelines. We

know it's a decision that has impacted the justice system here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The *Charter* is an important part of our national pride and our cultural fabric, and it is with good reason that we celebrate it today.

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. Thirty-five years ago, women across Canada had to fight to have gender enshrined in our *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* after it had been left out. At home, we lobbied Premier Brian Peckford. Then I was sent across the country on behalf of the women of Newfoundland and Labrador to lobby Premier Blakeney in Saskatchewan, and then on to Ottawa to lobby Prime Minister Trudeau to put women's rights back in the *Charter* through clause 29.

A reminder once again that our rights are never given to us but are hard won. Yes, let's celebrate, but we must always remain vigilant.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**MR. KIRBY:** Mr. Speaker, today I rise in this hon. House to congratulate Zoey Davis of Mount Pearl who is this year's recipient of the Lester B. Pearson Scholarship for Newfoundland and Labrador.

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

**MR. KIRBY:** Zoey is currently a level II student at O'Donel High School in Mount Pearl. She was selected based on her outstanding academic achievement, her involvement in extra-curricular activities and her dedicated

volunteerism within the community. Zoey has also won awards in public speaking and drama.

Mr. Speaker, the Lester B. Pearson Scholarship offers a life-changing opportunity for exceptional young people and will provide incredible support in helping Zoey fulfill her long-term goals. The scholarship is valued at \$80,000 over two years for pre-university study in the International Baccalaureate Program at Pearson College, a United World College in Victoria, British Columbia. The provincial government contributes \$34,000 to the scholarship.

I congratulate Zoey and hope her time at Pearson College enriches her life, solidifies the foundations for her academic future and opens doors to new and exciting opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, I also congratulate three other students who, on the strength of their applications and their performance in the selection process, have been offered and have accepted United World College placements. I am pleased to announce that Jack Kenny, a level II student at Exploits Valley High in Grand Falls-Windsor, has been accepted at the United World College of the Atlantic in Wales, United Kingdom. Manish Benuen, a level II student at Mealey Mountain Collegiate in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, has been accepted at Pearson College, in Victoria, British Columbia. As well, Andree Gaudet, a level II student at Gonzaga High School in St. John's, has accepted an offer to attend the United World College in Changshu, China.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating Zoey, Jack and Manish, as well as Andree, and wish them every success in their respective studies.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

I thank the minister for an advanced copy of his statement. On behalf of myself and the Official

Opposition, I am proud to stand and congratulate Zoey Davis of Mount Pearl for being this year's recipient of the Lester B. Pearson Scholarship for Newfoundland and Labrador. Zoey's excellence in academic achievements and dedication to her community are just some of the many qualities that make her a deserving recipient of this scholarship.

We would also like to congratulate Jack Kenny, Manish Benuen and Andree Gaudet. I offer my sincere congratulations to each of them, as well as to their teachers and families. These dedicated and accomplished young people have a bright future ahead of them and they are certainly a great source of pride for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

I, too, thank the minister for the advanced copy of his statement. It is wonderful that so many of our students such as Zoey, Jack and Manish achieve at such a high level each year and are worthy of scholarships and placements such as these.

I urge the Minister of Education to ensure that we continue to have adequate funding for our educational system to enable it to continue to maximize the potential of all of our students such as these wonderful people.

Thank you.

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

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

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

This April marks the 60th anniversary of the Canadian Cancer Society's Daffodil Month.

On Wednesday, April 5, I had the pleasure of attending this year's launch of Daffodil Month at Daffodil Place in St. John's. Since it opened in 2009, Daffodil Place has been a home away from home for more than 4,500 people from communities throughout our province.

For decades, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have supported the Daffodil campaign by making a donation, buying a daffodil pin or flowers and contributing to research and support. Mr. Speaker, this anniversary not only illustrates a long history of supporting those in our communities with cancer, but it also illustrates the giving nature of the many dedicated volunteers in our communities.

Last week, I had the honour of meeting Margot Reid, the longest-serving volunteer with the Canadian Cancer Society in the country, and was pleased to join in the celebration of her volunteer efforts.

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

**MR. HAGGIE:** Ms. Reid has volunteered for 66 years, having brought the Daffodil campaign to Newfoundland and Labrador over six decades ago. She has been selling flowers every spring since.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the House to join me today in remembering those in our community who benefit from the Daffodil campaign, and to offer our sincere gratitude to volunteers, like Ms. Reid, who give so generously of their time for others.

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 today. I certainly want to join with the minister in honouring and celebrating the contributions of Margot Reid, and it's certainly a contribution that is well worth noting in this House.

We join with government in recognizing this April as the 60th anniversary of the Canadian Cancer Society's Daffodil Month. The daffodil has long been the symbol of hope and strength to so many cancer patients and their families. Much like Daffodil Place has become a landmark in our province, symbolizing care and support for people dealing with a cancer diagnosis, it is a place of refuge when someone is in need.

Our administration was proud to support the Daffodil campaign, Daffodil Place and the Canadian Cancer Society, and I'm very happy to see that support continue with this current government. Thanks to all volunteers who make a positive and lasting difference in the lives of so many. You are really to be commended.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:**

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

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

I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. I'm absolutely delighted to stand and acknowledge the wonderful work by Margot Reid and the thousands of others who have promoted the Daffodil campaign.

At the same time, I remind the government that they have a duty to back up that wonderful work by making sure that those who are living with cancer do not carry a heavy financial burden because of the diagnosis and treatment caused by travel costs and the cost of drugs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Oral Questions.  
Oral Questions

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

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

Mr. Speaker, *Budget 2017* identified \$283 million in savings. I ask the minister will you provide today, the House of Assembly, on where these savings will come from.

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

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

I want to thank the Member opposite for the opportunity to stand up and answer this question. Last week, Members opposite would have been provided a technical briefing. In the technical briefing, there was information provided to them.

The expenses related to this fiscal year, savings of \$283 million, come from the zero-based budgeting work, which yielded \$65.9 million. The changes in management structure inside core government and the regional health authorities yielded \$30.8 million. We also reported savings from extended government boards and agencies in the tune of \$41.9 million. We also had annualized savings from last year, as well as some accounting benefit that built up that \$283 million.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

Well, the budget is a plan and there hasn't been a lot of transparency and details on the \$283 million savings in their plan. So I ask the minister: While you're not providing details, will you provide more details and specific details to the House or Members of the House and to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Mr. Speaker, for the Member opposite, I'm surprised actually around the context of his question, considering that the Opposition chose to remove the officials that



were in their briefing room that could have provided them some details on this question when they were in technical briefings last week. I don't know why they made that decision but certainly that was their choice to make.

Having said that, the Estimates process, which this House will go through in the next number of weeks, will provide opportunity in this House for a detailed discussion on the line items that build up the budget. The information that the Members opposite are looking for, I'm sure they'll get their answers in the Estimates debate.

Thank you.

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

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Thank you very much.

Minister, I didn't participate in the technical briefing. Some of your staff sat in the office with us and they offered to leave so we could have a discussion. That was my recollection of what happened last week, Minister.

People of the province care about the details of what was contained in your budget and there's not a lot: \$283 million in savings and there's not a lot of detail; 2016-17 fiscal year, there are public sector jobs that were cut in a number of rounds and we have asked for updated details on job cuts. The minister has promised to provide them. We have not received them yet. You provided one about five or six weeks ago, but we haven't got an updated one.

So I ask the minister: Will you provide a comprehensive list of up-to-date impacted positions and their departments that you have cut in 2016-2017?

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

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

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Mr. Speaker, if the Members opposite have questions about the five areas and categories that I have referred to and our officials referred to in technical briefings,

and I have been referring to publically, I will continue to answer those questions. I will continue to say that in addition to the zero-based budgeting dollars that we were able to save, we realized savings through the changes in management structure. We have savings through extended government agencies of the tune of \$41.9 million.

We have annualized savings from the program decisions that were made as part of budget '16-'17 of an additional \$68.1 million. We have net savings, including actuarial calculations and accrual adjustments, of \$77 million, Mr. Speaker. The Estimates will provide the opportunity for further questions.

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

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

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

Well actually, Minister, Question Period provides the opportunity for further questions. The question I asked is: Will you provide an updated list of all impacted positions from 2016-2017? It's a simple question, Minister. Will you provide the details of that?

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

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Mr. Speaker, I fully expect that when we participate in the Estimates debate and the Estimates discussion that the Members opposite will ask that exact question and information that we have available, we will share with the Members opposite. But the suggestion, albeit subtle or direct, that somehow there is something hidden in a budget that is presented to this House for budget debate and for Estimates review, quite frankly, is wrong, and I think is problematic for the Members opposite who continue to have a habit of creating anxiety, where in fact there is none.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

That from the minister who promised transparency and openness – I asked a very simple question for an updated list, and it's very clear that she is refusing to provide that to the people of the province and the Members of the House.

So, Minister, I'll try this. Agencies, boards and commissions were identified and according to the budget documents there are over \$70 million in savings. Will you be open and transparent in this case and provide some information on the number of jobs that will be lost as a result of these reductions? Or do you know what the impact is?

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

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Mr. Speaker, I want to correct the Member opposite. I did not refuse to answer the question. He continues to make allegations like that and that has not been my practice in this House.

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

**MS. C. BENNETT:** When we have information that we can share, we will share it. The Estimates debates, the Estimates discussion provides all Opposition, just like it provided us in Opposition, the ability to ask questions that will be answered in detail. They can ask those questions and answers will be provided.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to correct the Member opposite who said that savings from agencies, boards and commissions were somewhere in the tune – I think the number he used was 70. I want to more precisely say that it's \$41.9 million. As I've said publicly, when we make operational decisions and our employees are impacted, we will communicate with them first, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

The minister likes to take her time to point out and make corrections. Well, I'll make a correction: I didn't say you wouldn't answer the question. I said you won't provide the information. Your openness and transparency is a failure because you're refusing to provide the details. That's the problem.

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** So, Minister, when can agencies, boards and commissions, and those who work for agencies, boards and commissions get some details and understanding of what's coming for them in their significant reductions that they're going to face? When will you be upfront and open with them?

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

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that the Members in this House can check *Hansard*, as I will do, and I'm sure the Member opposite will do. He clearly indicated that I refused to answer the question, as has been his practice in this House for the last number of months, and I will not accept that accusation, Mr. Speaker. He has the right – and we will provide the details to the questions in the Estimates.

The question he asked just then about agencies, boards and commissions, the CEOs and the boards that are in place will be reviewing efficiency, they'll be reviewing the structures, they will be reviewing services they provide, how they deliver things, and the operational decisions they make will be communicated to their employees when there are small impacts at that time.

Thank you.

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

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

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

Grant funding that supports sector diversification and innovation in Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation has been cut

from \$1.3 million last year to just \$155,000 this year – a cut of 88 per cent of the budget.

I ask the minister: What are the impacts of this cut?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation.

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

I'd be delighted to answer the question in more detail to the Member in Estimates and provide a detailed listing of what the grants and subsidies are appropriated for.

We had a carryover last year in the fiscal budget for broadband initiatives of \$1.27 million, I believe that was, for the broadband initiatives that were clueing up over last year. So that can account for a difference.

Thank you.

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

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

**MR. KENT:** Mr. Speaker, it's clear what the Liberal Party line is today: Wait for the Estimates Committees and then we'll answer your questions about this mysterious budget.

Mr. Speaker, I say to this hon. House, people don't want to wait until some committee meeting three weeks down the road. They want answers today in the House of Assembly from the minister who's responsible. That's what we're demanding.

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

**MR. KENT:** He wouldn't answer that question, so let me ask another.

Seven hundred thousand dollars has been cut from regional economic development and business development, which provides support for regional and community economic development opportunities.

How will support for rural parts of this province be impacted by this \$700,000 funding cut?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation.

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

I find it very ironic to get questioned from the Member opposite about rural Newfoundland and Labrador and what their plan is for their economic development initiatives. They were the ones who did not support the RED Boards and cut them by a significant amount.

When it actually comes to the cutback for the regional diversification fund that is in the budget, it was a directive by their administration to cut the budget by \$100,000 every single year for a period of four years, and that is the directive that they had put forward.

As well as the initiatives that we put forward, we're being very strategic when it comes to investments in the rural economy. Whether it be \$13 million in tourism advertising, that's 18,000 jobs in the economy; aquaculture investment, Mr. Speaker. There are significant investments that are benefiting rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

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

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

**MR. KENT:** It's unfortunate that the minister won't explain any of the cuts to Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation – millions of dollars of cuts, when we will be asking more questions.

I now ask the Minister of Natural Resources: When can the people expect an oversight report on Muskrat Falls from your government? The last one was released in December 2015, almost a year and a half ago.

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

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

I thank the hon. Member for his question. We've been very methodical and very diligent on making sure the Muskrat Falls Project is on track. We have a new board of directors, an expanded and a very stellar board of directors. We have a world-class CEO. We've made changes to the federal loan guarantee and expanded it. We've finalized a re-negotiation with Astaldi. All these things add to methodical and diligent improvements in this project, and really was emphasized in the last annual general meeting only held a couple of weeks ago.

Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, we also announced that we were adding independence to the Oversight Committee. We have four incredibly talented volunteers from our community who have come forward and will add their expertise to the Oversight Committee and they will continue to advise government and the people this project (inaudible).

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

**MS. COADY:** Thank you.

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

**MR. KENT:** Mr. Speaker, I applaud the government for strengthening the board of Nalcor and for adding –

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

**MR. KENT:** – additional expertise to the Oversight Committee. These are good moves. These are responsible moves, and I commend government for making them. But the minister today has not answered my question.

Why has it not been a priority to provide public updates on the oversight of Muskrat Falls, as you had committed to do? It's been almost 18 months. I ask the minister: Why haven't you ensured the open and transparent release of information related to Muskrat Falls Project?

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

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

**MS. COADY:** Mr. Speaker, we have been truly open and transparent about the Muskrat Falls Project – really transparent about the Muskrat Falls project. We were left with an incredible mess in this province and we have taken the time over the last 18 months or 16 months that we've been in office to ensure that we have the incredibly important governance and the incredibly – as the Member opposite said, he applauds us on our efforts of ensuring this.

The Oversight Committee has been expanded. They are doing their work. They have been doing their work methodically and diligently, Mr. Speaker. I'll continue to use those words because that's what we've been doing. Oversight will continue for this project. We will continue to make sure the information is public. Mr. Speaker, I think the people of this province understand the amount of work we've done to fix their problem.

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

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

**MR. KENT:** Mr. Speaker, I'm glad to hear the minister say that oversight is important, but why not release those oversight reports? Public reporting is also important when it comes to oversight of the project.

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

**MR. KENT:** In 2016-2017, the Royalties and Benefits division spent \$4.5 million on professional services, despite only having \$670,000 budgeted.

I ask the minister: Can she account for this significant difference?

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

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

You're shifting from the incredibly important Oversight Committee to a very detailed question on royalties and benefits. Mr. Speaker, the Royalties and Benefits division of the Natural Resources Department is very active, very engaged with ensuring the people of this

province have the royalties and benefits given to them by the people who exercise the rights in the offshore oil and gas.

We make sure the contracts are reviewed. We make sure we do audits on the oil and gas companies and we've invested some money in ensuring that we have the resources that we need to ensure that these contracts are upheld. More details obviously will be coming as we get into Estimates, but we will continue to make the investments to ensure the offshore oil and gas industries provide the (inaudible).

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

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

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

**MR. KENT:** Mr. Speaker, that's the third minister to stand in Question Period today and say stay tuned for an Estimates Committee meeting down the road. That's not acceptable to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker.

Almost \$4 million additional, over budget, was spent by the Royalties and Benefits division in 2016-2017 on professional services. I'm going to give the minister another opportunity to answer the question: Why the almost \$4 million overrun on professional services in the Royalties and Benefits division in 2016-2017?

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

**MS. COADY:** Allow me to correct the Member opposite. Clearly, he did not hear my answer, Mr. Speaker. I was clear in saying we were ensuring in the Royalties and Benefits division of Natural Resources that we held to account the oil and gas companies, making sure that the contracts that they have signed on to, the royalties and benefits that are being paid to this province – we have to pay lawyers because we go to arbitration. We have to review the contracts that are being done.

So we made investments in the department to ensure that people of this province realize the royalties and benefits that are required under the contracts with the oil and gas industry. We'll

continue to do that because we are diligent. We're not like the other former PC administration that allowed ballooning escalation, for example, in the Muskrat Falls Project.

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

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

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

In the Budget Speech your government committed to a tuition freeze at Memorial University and the College of the North Atlantic. Does the minister still stand by that commitment?

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

**MR. BYRNE:** Thank you for the excellent question. What an excellent opportunity to highlight what we're doing as investments not only in post-secondary education, but in maintaining a tuition at the College of the North Atlantic and Memorial University of Newfoundland. In fact, Mr. Speaker, in the Budget Speech we outlined that \$56 million will be invested specifically to maintain a tuition freeze for Newfoundland and Labrador students both at MUN, and an additional almost \$11 million for the College of the North Atlantic.

Now, Mr. Speaker, just put this in perspective for a little bit: \$56 million for the tuition freeze is more financial assistance, government assistance, taxpayer assistance, than what the Government of Nova Scotia provides to Acadia University or to StFX.

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

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

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

MUN President Gary Kachanoski said that an \$11.9 million cut to its operating grant is more than double what was expected. Was there any analysis done of the impact that the \$11.9 million cut would have to MUN?

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

**MR. BYRNE:** Excellent question, Mr. Speaker, and an excellent opportunity to highlight the fact that analysis provides us with a lot of information, a lot of data. We think of tuition as being a cost of an education, a university education. In fact, it's really not the cost; it's an input of revenue. But there are also other revenue items, for example subsidies from taxpayers.

In Canada in costs, on average, about \$19,000 for an undergraduate education per student, per year; in Newfoundland and Labrador, it costs about \$31,000. So there's a real, real difference here. We feel that through efficiencies at Memorial University of Newfoundland, that the tuition freeze can be maintained while a top, top-quality education is maintained in the process.

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

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

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

So I take from that there was no analysis done.

Did you consult with the university prior to making your announcement regarding the tuition freeze and were they confident that they could stay within the budget you were providing them to ensure the tuition freeze existed?

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

**MR. BYRNE:** Mr. Speaker, what an excellent question and what an excellent opportunity for me to highlight the fact that yes, we did consult with the university in advance. We consulted with the president and senior stakeholders, but as the president did indicate – which is always the case – it is the Board of Regents which will decide the course of business, the final decision making of the university. They'll be bringing that information back to the board.

At \$56 million to maintain a tuition freeze at Memorial University of Newfoundland, I am

very, very confident that the university's Board of Regents will have the resources to maintain a tuition freeze for Newfoundland and Labrador students.

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

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

**MS. PERRY:** When looking at the Estimates documents they reveal that the division which is responsible for the delivery of essential services to children, youth and their families has been cut by over \$3 million – from \$132 million down to \$129 million.

I ask the minister: How will this cut impact services for our most vulnerable?

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

**MR. KIRBY:** Mr. Speaker, this government takes the protection of children and youth very seriously. We have seen too many times in the past where children have been in harm's way because of inaction on someone or another's part. We are doing the best job we can to make sure those incidents never happen again in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador.

So it's vital that we protect children and youth interests. As the Minister of Finance has said numerous times now, when we have Estimates Committees – and there will be hours and hours and hours of time provided to ask detailed questions such as the Member's – the Member will get an answer to this question and any other that she has through the Estimates process.

Thank you.

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

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

**MS. PERRY:** A whole lot of openness and transparency going on here.

We are also shocked, Mr. Speaker, to see in *Budget 2017* to discover that the Disability Policy Office was cut by \$50,000 in this budget.

What programs and services will be reduced or cut as a result?

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

**MR. KIRBY:** Mr. Speaker, the rights of people with disabilities in Newfoundland and Labrador is extremely important to all Members of the House of Assembly, regardless of what side of the House Members sit on. We have made commitments to people with disabilities over the course of the election campaign in 2015, and we intend to keep those commitments.

I encourage the Member to stay tuned to the legislative process for that. There are many good things that are going to be announced for people with disabilities as we continue to move along to a more inclusive Newfoundland and Labrador, which is really fundamental to moving forward *The Way Forward*, the vision for the province.

As I previously said in my last answer, the Member will have an opportunity to ask detailed questions about where money is moved in the Estimates document when we have those Committee meetings.

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

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

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

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

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance has stated the Liberals will watch every dollar and eliminate waste.

Does the minister think spending tens of thousands of dollars of taxpayers' money on free skiing when people are struggling to get by under the weight of your government's excessive taxes ...?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation.

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

I find it very ironic that the Member opposite is asking this particular question. Because when I talked to the former board chair, and other members of the board, they stated they were held back, they were directed not to run Marble Mountain like a business, to generate and maximize revenue as a Crown corporation. For such a pristine provincial asset, 12 years of neglect and failed outcomes when it comes – and I said last week that Marble Mountain was not living up to its full potential as a provincial asset, and it certainly can.

The Auditor General's report of 2012 highlighted numerous problems, but they failed to act and get the results they needed to. As well, they invested \$4.6 million of taxpayers' money because the insurance program wasn't up to date enough to cover the cost. So they wasted taxpayers' money, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South for a quick question, no preamble.

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

Mr. Speaker, I say to the Minister of AES, the champion of free ski giveaways at Marble, why not –

**MR. SPEAKER:** I ask the Member to get to his question.

**MR. PETTEN:** – introduce this type of promotion at the beginning of ski season and not at the end?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education Skills and Labor.

**MR. BYRNE:** I think the question was why didn't we introduce the promotion at the beginning of the season as opposed to it at the end. Well, Mr. Speaker, we did respond to the fact that the hill customers were very dissatisfied, very frustrated, that there was a decision to close the hill while ski conditions appeared to be probably in the best condition that they have ever, ever been in a very long

time. Notwithstanding all of that, we are promoting the bill. They never.

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

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

**MS. MICHAEL:** Mr. Speaker, yesterday we tried to get the Minister of Finance to tell the people of the province important details about her budget that she did not include in the Budget Speech. Today we will continue to try to get answers on the record in this House for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador so they can get the whole story.

Schedule III attached to last week's Budget Speech showed a drop of more than \$400 million in salaries and employee benefits. I ask the Minister of Finance after adjusting for one-time items and previously announced management layoffs, what is the net reduction in funding for salaries and employee benefits?

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

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Mr. Speaker, the number that the Member opposite is referring to is a reflection of the consolidation of salaries and benefits across government, as she referenced, and it is obvious that she left officials in her technical briefing.

As she rightly referenced, there are some one-time numbers that impact that 416, which she referenced. In addition to that, there would be the numbers that were reflective of the decisions that were made in last year's budget. There are no reflections in that line item related to decisions that have yet to be made around small operational changes that may result in the work were doing in *The Way Forward*, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MS. MICHAEL:** Mr. Speaker, what I'm asking the minister is to tell this House how much money is going to have to be spent and how many public employees will have to be laid off in order to achieve the amount of savings that she's not even telling us.

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

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Mr. Speaker, I met with, last week, union leadership for our public sector unions, and I shared with them, in advance of the budget, our position as a government that this budget would not reflect massive layoffs, and that's exactly what the budget reflects.

The number that the Member opposite is referring to is from and including a large number that relates to actuarial calculations, as she is aware. There is nothing in the budget that is about hiding massive layoffs. I would suggest that the Member opposite may want to consider the fear mongering that she is perpetuating and anxiety levels inside public sector employees.

We are having a discussion with our unions and we will continue to have this discussion at the table.

Thank you.

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

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

**MS. ROGERS:** Mr. Speaker, the people of the province want fair and open and transparent answers. The minister was unable or reluctant to answer questions in the House yesterday on the forecasted unemployment rate for this province.

I ask the minister: Would she stand and tell the people of the province the projected unemployment rate for 2021, and explain why that rate will grow so much over the next five years?

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

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

I appreciate the question from the Member opposite. As many people in this province understand, we have seen a significant shift in our economy. Our economy is in transition, coming off of and moving through the conclusion of several major megaprojects in a



population that is the size of just over half a million. That's a significant transition.

Our government is focused on improving employment numbers. We have done that though the \$3 billion infrastructure plan, which will create the equivalent of 43,000 positions on an annual basis. We have done that through *The Way Forward* targets which will contribute in excess of 9,000 positions or equivalents over the next number of years once we achieve those targets. We are very much focused on employment in our province.

Thank you.

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

**MS. ROGERS:** Mr. Speaker, *Budget 2016* took a heavy toll on many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Budget documents point to a 3.2 per cent reduction in average household income for this coming year.

I ask the minister: How does she expect the economy to recover when people are suffering, their incomes are declining, and all but one of the taxation measures from *Budget 2016* remain in effect?

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

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

I thank the Member opposite for asking the question today, again, that she referenced yesterday. I want to correct her, though, because the assumption that she's presenting to this House is actually inaccurate. If she looks at the household disposable income that was forecasted last year, for fiscal '17, and the number that's forecasted this year, it actually went from \$16.5 million in income for households up to \$17.1 million, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

**Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given**

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

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

In response to a request by the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi in this House on April 5, I rise today to table information on the benefits and cost-sharing arrangement associated with BizPal. Based on a calculation by the staff in Service NL, it estimates a savings for Newfoundland and Labrador businesses of some \$4,400,000 per year, Sir. So I table that document today.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Further answers to questions for which notice has been given?

Petitions.

**Petitions**

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

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

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

WHEREAS government has removed the provincial point-of-sale tax rebate on books, which will raise the tax on books from 5 per cent to 15 per cent; and

WHEREAS an increase in the tax on books will reduce book sales to the detriment of local bookstores, publishers and authors, and the

amount collected by government must be weighed against the loss in economic activity caused by higher book prices; and

WHEREAS Newfoundland and Labrador has one of the lowest literacy rates in the Canada and the other provinces do not tax books because they recognize the need to encourage reading and literacy; and

WHEREAS this province has many nationally and internationally known storytellers, but we will be the only people in Canada who will have to pay our provincial government a tax to read the books of our own writers;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government not to impose a provincial sales tax on books.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise, yet again, to present a petition that has been signed by people all over the province about this very regressive tax on books that makes no sense. I'd like to just come back again to some of the clauses in this particular petition, because they really tell the story.

The tax on books will go from 5 per cent, which is federal tax, to 15 per cent – again, the only province in the country, even though we have the highest illiteracy rate, the growing highest unemployment rate in the country. So that's going from 5 per cent to 15 per cent.

It's saying also that a tax on books will reduce book sales to the detriment of local bookstores. We've had book sellers who've told us that. In fact, people are ordering online because for some of the booksellers online, they aren't charging the provincial sales tax. Although they are required to do so, they aren't doing it.

So it's an unfair advantage, and an unfair, extra burden on our local booksellers. We all know everywhere in the province how hard it is for local booksellers, and how important it is for local booksellers – how important it is to have local bookstores where people can browse, where people can take their kids to look through

books, where adults can look through books. We know how important that is, but they're having a hard time.

Publishers are telling us that. Publishers are telling us they're not going to be able to take the risk on new authors that they have been able to because of the imposition of this tax creating a heavier burden for them. It flies in the face of reason, Mr. Speaker. It absolutely flies in the face of reason.

Thank you very much.

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

**MS. PERRY:** 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 has been an identified lack of mental health services in our province's K-12 school system; and

WHEREAS this 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-12 school system.

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

Mr. Speaker, we've often talked in this House of Assembly, particularly in recent years with the All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions, of the seriousness of mental health issues. We often talk in this House of the importance of our children and how they are the future.

In terms of mental health, if left unchecked, children will carry mental health issues throughout their entire lives. We feel it is of critical importance to ensure that early intervention can and does take place. The school system, Mr. Speaker, is the ideal place for this to happen.

In many of the presentations that we were fortunate to receive during the all-party consultations on mental health and addictions, this issue was raised over and over and over again. While we recognize that there are challenges with respect to fiscal restraints in this province, we also know that money is forthcoming from the federal government for mental health and we have to make priorities. We think increasing the budget for mental health services in K-12 will have benefits for centuries to come, and we call upon government to seriously consider it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I'm honoured to rise in the House today and present the following petition.

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 infertility is not an inconvenience; it is a disease of the reproductive system that impairs the body's ability to perform the basic function of reproduction; and

WHEREAS infertility affects men and women equally; and

WHEREAS treating infertility is excessively expensive and cost prohibitive; and

WHEREAS infertility impairs the ability of individuals and couples to conceive children and begin to build a family;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to implement a program that assists individuals and couples, allowing them access to affordable in vitro fertilization services.

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

Mr. Speaker, there are some programs to support couples and individuals dealing with fertility issues in our province. There are programs that exist through Eastern Health, but for quite some time there have been families calling on government to do more and to provide some services that are not offered here but are offered elsewhere, often at great expense to families in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I was contacted recently by a constituent who wanted these concerns brought to the House of Assembly and asked me to present a petition in that regard. So rather than provide my own commentary today on that petition, I'd like to share some of her words with this hon. House.

She's writing about concerns we all have about getting IVF coverage in the province: I feel like fertility is something that is taken for granted by most people and taboo for those who actually go through it and, because of this, it is not talked about. Everyone will go to the fertility clinic, get their test procedures and try to forget about it. I think it's about time that people start looking at the clinic as a relief and exciting experience, knowing that finally there will be a solution.

The last thing that should influence a person's emotions and decision making at the clinic is finances. No one should have to remortgage, take out a loan or sell the things we have worked so hard to get. Most people are worried about saving money for maternity leave, when people with fertility issues have to owe so much money from the beginning.

I feel like I shouldn't complain about something unless I'm going to do something to help solve the problem, so that's why I'm contacting you. I think it's about time the government actually start something that the rest of the country can look up to, instead of merely following along. Why wait until every other province offers

fertility treatment? I think that we should join Ontario and Quebec and cover fertility treatments. I am willing to give out a petition if you're willing to present my concerns.

Today, I'm pleased to have the opportunity to do so. Mr. Speaker, I know I'm running out of time. This is an important issue. It affects many families in my district and districts across the province. I look forward to discussing it further in the House of Assembly in the weeks ahead.

Thank you.

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

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

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

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

WHEREAS the US Center for Disease Control now estimates that Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) affects one in 68 children, which represents a 30 per cent increase from the estimate two years ago; and

WHEREAS early diagnosis of ASD is essential because there is a critical developmental period when early intervention is vital for future success of children with ASD;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to allow other specialists trained and certified with ADOS to make the Autism Spectrum Disorder diagnosis.

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

Mr. Speaker, there are so many issues that people on the autism spectrum have to face. A key one is that youth and adults with autism who have an IQ of 70 or more are not eligible for services offered to people with intellectual

disabilities. So the only thing this recognizes is saying that if you have an IQ of above 70, basically you're not on the spectrum. We know that's not true; many people with autism who are IQ 70 or above need services such as job coaches, life coaches, caregiver respite, just as much of those who have an IQ under 70. What's needed, Mr. Speaker, is a functionality test, not an IQ test, that measures social interaction and self-care abilities.

There's been work done at the School of Social Work here at Memorial University and their research has shown what the impact of this rule is. They found that this barrier, only giving services to people with IQs under 70, has had serious heart-breaking impacts. People with autism have suffered isolation and inability to realize their potential. Families have shouldered enormous burdens of care.

Successive governments in this House have promised to eliminated the IQ 70 eligibility criterion for people with autism. It is in the current Health Minister's mandate letter, but nothing has changed. It's time for action and an update from government. To continue with this rule, or this criterion, is to continue ignoring the needs of so many people in this province.

When one is on the autism spectrum, Mr. Speaker, there are so many elements to what that means. Very often you will have somebody who is extremely intelligent but who has a real disability when it comes to social interaction; when it comes to mixing with other people; when it comes to growth as an individual in every way, not just intellectually, Mr. Speaker.

I really urge this government to listen to the people who have signed this petition, to listen to the people who are ADS and to listen to the people who care for them and to change this criterion.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

To the hon. House of Assembly of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in Parliament

assembled, the petition of the undersigned residents of Newfoundland and Labrador humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS government recently cut vital funding to many of the province's youth organizations; and

WHEREAS the cuts to grants to youth organizations will have a devastating impact on the communities, as well the youth and families; and

WHEREAS many of these organizations deeply rely on what was rightfully considered core funding for their day-to-day operations;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to reinstate funding to the province's youth organizations immediately.

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

Mr. Speaker, I've had an opportunity to speak to this a number of times but, more importantly, I had an opportunity to speak to a number of youth organizations who have been affected by the dramatic cuts that were implemented last year but announced six months later, at a time when most of these organizations had already committed that part of the funding that they had taken forever and a day as being core funding. So not only did they now have less money, they'd already spent money, had to readjust their budgets to make up for lost revenue, and then also absorb the full cost of the impact on the cuts. Some was up to 60 per cent of the core funding.

Move forward, five months later, we're into it again, where that same 60 per cent cut is no longer part of their budget lines. So they're now really struggling in a lot of cases to find ways to adjust and provide the services that are very valuable to the people of this province, particularly the young people.

Inherent in our society is that government has a responsibility to support, particularly agencies that go out of their way to enhance education, social inclusion, healthy well-being, physical

health. All these are important components of what we do in our society and what we're responsible for.

From a business point of view, when we have an organization that can leverage four to five times as much money for programs and services than we invest, then that's a good business plan. If you add into that that government would be responsible for providing those same services at a much higher cost, you now look at it and you've got a dual benefit for having a partnership developed with organizations such as Boys and Girls Clubs or Big Brothers Big Sisters, or Scouts and Guides or all the youth organizations who do valued work out there for providing these type of services.

We've talked about things around mental health. What better organization to deal with some of the mental health issues in our society than youth organizations who have professionals who are trained around the focus of inclusion and ensuring that young people get the best provided service possible? So this in itself is an inherent ability for government to partner with organizations who, in a lot of cases, have provincial bodies that oversee what they do and support it, have national bodies and, in a number of cases, international organizations that support that.

You have a wealth of knowledge. You have people from various backgrounds, from education backgrounds, from social work backgrounds to health backgrounds helping design programs and services that we can avail of and use for the people of this province.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'll have an opportunity to speak to this again and show that the investment that should be made is a benefit to all taxpayers in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I call Orders of the Day.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Orders of the Day.

**Orders of the Day**

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

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

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

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

I appreciate the opportunity to rise again today, this time to speak to the budget. The motion that we're actually debating today, that the House Leader just referred to, it reads: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board to move that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

It won't come as a big surprise to Members opposite that I do not support the general budgetary policy of this current government. I know that upsets some. Although I will point out before I get into my more serious remarks today that the Government House Leader and I do agree on a couple of things. For instance, we're both thrilled that the Montreal Canadiens have made the NHL playoffs again this year. Believe it or not, I'm also pleased that the Toronto Maple Leafs has made the playoffs.

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

**MR. KENT:** I am pleased because my father is a Leafs fan. We've watched a few games together this season. I think it's good for hockey, good for Canada, and good for the sport to have the Leafs back in the playoffs. So good luck to both teams and we'll see the Leafs on the golf course after they face the Capitals probably, but we'll see.

I have an opportunity today to speak to a number of issues and before I dive into the budget, I'd like to talk a little bit about the Throne Speech. I haven't had an opportunity yet to speak to the Throne Speech. I didn't feel there was an urgency to speak to the Throne Speech because we'll have a chance to reply to it throughout this calendar year. I didn't feel there was a lot new in

the Throne Speech. I didn't feel that there was actually a lot to talk about, and let me explain a little more about why that is.

We actually saw lots of rhetoric and buzz words in the Throne Speech; words like complete, develop, outline, advance, focus, collaborate, leverage, but it was extremely, extremely vague on details. There was a great deal about the past, which this government loves to focus on. There was a great deal about the actions that the previous administration had taken in energy development; that the previous administration had taken in health care, in multi-year infrastructure funding, in long-term care and in violence prevention.

Mr. Speaker, what we didn't hear about in the Throne Speech a few weeks ago was what's to come, what's the vision, what's the plan, what are the ideas and the solutions that are going to move Newfoundland and Labrador forward. And that's what the people in Newfoundland and Labrador are crying out for.

They've had enough of the rhetoric and politics as usual, and certainly they've had enough of this Liberal government's obsession with the past. We've now got a government that's been in office for a year and a half. They're in the second year of their mandate. They'll soon be halfway through their mandate and it's time to lead; it's time to govern.

So let's talk about the future, let's talk about the present and let's talk about what's to come to move Newfoundland and Labrador forward. What we saw in the Throne Speech was a speech that was very vague, full of intentions, short on details. Some of the buzz words leave people to wonder if they are, in fact, covering cuts that are to come. That was reflected in the Budget Speech as well, which I'll get a chance to speak to this afternoon.

In fact, the tone was quite clear from Question Period today. We saw at least four Cabinet ministers stand and say wait until the Estimates debate. We don't need to answer your questions now. We don't want to reveal details about what's actually contained in the budget and what the impact will be. Wait until an Estimates Committee meeting three or four weeks down the road.

Now, the people of the province, for the most part, won't have an opportunity to see the Estimates proceedings. They may choose to read *Hansard* or listen online. Those opportunities are available. However, they won't get the same kind of attention that happens when you ask questions of ministers in Question Period. So that general theme today among Cabinet ministers of wait until Estimates and you can ask your questions there when the people of the province are not watching, for the most part, that's really unfortunate and it causes people to wonder what's being hidden.

I think the general reaction to the budget has very much been: Well, thank God it wasn't worse than last year. Well, it may not have been much worse than last year, but it certainly wasn't any better. I think as we go through the Estimates process that will become more obvious. I hear the catcalling from Members opposite. The fact remains that of the 300 new taxes and levies and fees that were introduced in last year's budget, only one of the 300 was partially adjusted in this year's budget.

It's pretty well the same budget. They've improved their communications. They've fired some people in the Premier's office and replaced them a couple of times, I believe. Yet their general communication strategy seems to have improved. The budget was certainly packaged better than last year's, but it wasn't actually a budget that was very different from the year previous.

So back to the Throne Speech, let's talk about what was not said and what was not covered. There were a number of omissions that really jumped out at me. One was: Where was the attention to Labrador, which appeared to be thrown in as an afterthought? Where is the generic royalty regime, which *The Way Forward* promised to deliver, which was actually completed in 2015 by the previous administration? Where was the reference to Mistaken Point, which just achieved UNESCO status? Something that we're very proud of – I know the Member for Ferryland, my colleague, the Opposition House Leader, is quite passionate about and Members of my caucus and I think even Members opposite would attest to that.

Where were the specifics in the Throne Speech related to inclusion, which is a huge issue for teachers and for parents and for students in our province? Where are the references to growing rural Newfoundland and Labrador, which seems to be ignored in the Throne Speech and again in the budget?

There are many references to aquaculture, but what about the fish processing sector? There were references, which I was quite pleased to see, related to the All-Party Committee report on mental health and addictions. As I've said many times, and I'll say it here again this afternoon, I believe that the current government and future governments will move forward on those recommendations – all 54 of them in the All-Party Committee report on mental health and addictions. So a \$5 million commitment in this year's budget is a start, but there's a lot more work to do. In a \$3 billion health care system, \$5 million I know, for a fact, doesn't go very far.

Where was the commitment to social policy? There were very vague references in the Throne Speech. Overall, Madam Speaker, where is the foundation for hope and confidence? People want a vision. They want a plan. *The Way Forward* doesn't provide it. The document that has been released this year by the Liberal administration doesn't provide the hope and confidence that our people are looking for. There is a trust issue, given the broken promises from the 2015 Liberal election platform. People want leadership. They want a vision, they want a plan, they want hope and they want confidence. We didn't see it in the Throne Speech a few weeks ago. We didn't see it in the budget last week.

There were phrases and oversights in the Throne Speech that really make us wonder if there are more cuts coming: cuts to the College of the North Atlantic; cuts to Newfoundland and Labrador Housing – because we believe there is a major restructuring coming, based on numerous reports that we have received. There may be an end to the tuition freeze at Memorial University and College of the North Atlantic. We raised the issue in Question Period today. The Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island asked questions today specifically about that issue and recent comments made by the president of Memorial University.

We had a speech that was full of buzz phrases that do leave people concerned. We will do better with less, was one of the lines used. We heard it again in the budget last week. That reminds us of a statement way back by the current Premier when he indicated that nurses should be working harder. The simple concept of we will do better with less is not a fiscal policy, and it's not a vision that is going to propel Newfoundland and Labrador forward.

We also saw statements like: We are not seeing sufficient return on investment. That does cause concern. I don't necessarily disagree with the statement. We should be maximizing the benefit of our resources in Newfoundland and Labrador. We are asset-rich. If you look at the assets in Newfoundland and Labrador, we are a very wealthy and prosperous place, and we need to realize the potential of those assets. So to see sufficient return on investment makes sense, but when government says it without backing it up, it causes people to wonder what's coming.

Flatter, Leaner Management Structure: On the surface, I'd say that's not a bad thing either. A more efficient approach to the delivery and management of government services is a good thing. But the devil is in the details in this instance, Madam Speaker, because we're talking about people's lives. We're talking about the lives of people who depend on government programs and services and utilize government programs and services.

We're also talking about the thousands of dedicated women and men in our province who deliver those public services and what impact some of these changes has on them. We need to do government differently. We need to be smarter about how we deliver government programs and services, so a Flatter, Leaner Management Structure on the surface sounds like a good thing. Making sure we get good return on our investments is a good thing. But what does government really mean and where is the plan to support those statements?

There were some very political statements near the beginning of the Throne Speech, which seemed a little inappropriate, actually. We all in this hon. House have great respect for His Honour the Lieutenant Governor and to hear

political words being put in the mouth of His Honour, I found a little troublesome and not necessarily the kind of tone and approach that you like to see in a Throne Speech. Words about the current government inheriting problems and placing political blame; words about facts being hidden from people. That's not leadership.

People are growing incredibly tired of the blame game. There's been no government in the history of this province that has made every decision correctly. I would argue that during – I was around for two-thirds of our previous administration and I saw lots of good things happen. I saw lots of decisions made and investments made that improved our province's position overall and made it a better place today than it was 15 years ago.

But that's not to say that every decision was perfect. There are things that I would absolutely do differently if I had supreme power and was in a position to do so, and we need to learn from the past and make sure we have a solid plan for the future. That's what's required. That's leadership. We've seen a real lack of that from this government.

The government may be trying to politicize every other office of government, and we've seen tons of political appointments, even in the most senior office of the civil service, as with the Clerk of the Executive Council. When I saw the Liberal government politicizing the Throne Speech and politicizing the words coming out of the mouth of the Lieutenant Governor, I felt it was a little bit too far, Madam Speaker, and I feel the need to highlight that during my time this afternoon.

There were many references to collaborating with the federal government and leveraging, but no references to the broken promises on the \$400 million fisheries investment fund, or Ottawa's failure to deliver fairness on equalization, and the province's refusal to fight for it when other provinces are getting amounts of funding that would completely change the challenges we face.

Let me elaborate on that, because I've talked a lot about equalization and I've had one of our province's MPs publicly attack me and some of my statements on the issue. I'm not suggesting



for a moment that Newfoundland and Labrador should build a plan for the future that's based on being dependent on Ottawa. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, with all the resources we have, it is entirely possible that we can get back on the path towards prosperity and self-reliance and we can be sustainable. We have lots of assets that can make this province sustainable for generations to come, and that's what our focus should be on.

But we need some help along the way. We have a very resource-dependent economy, and there has been lots of great work done over the years to diversify the economy and to pursue other industries, ranging from the tech sector to ocean technology, the knowledge-based economy. We've seen huge growth in tourism. Our fishery remains a very viable sector in Newfoundland and Labrador and continues to do a lot of great things, particularly in rural communities. There are lots of good things happening that we should be excited about.

What we have right now is a cash problem. We don't have an asset problem; we have lots of wonderful assets that can lead to a very prosperous future for Newfoundland and Labrador. We definitely have a cash problem; we have a spending problem.

Now, in the final years of our administration, government spending was curbed and we actually reduced the size of the public service, which obviously is unfortunate for those that are impacted by that, but we have to be responsible and live within our means, no doubt. So we had an attrition plan that we were implementing, and it was working, that would have resulted in many young people keeping their jobs within the public service, holding on to lots of that next generation of talent which we so desperately need to continue revitalizing and renewing the public service. I feel that would have been fairly effective in helping manage some of the fiscal challenges that we face. Nonetheless, there's more work needed to reduce government spending.

Now we see a budget this year where the spending in this year's budget that we're currently debating on the floor of this House, the spending level is actually higher than the budget of 2015, two years ago. The spending limit is

higher, so we felt all this pain of 300 new taxes and fees and levies and threats to close libraries and new taxes on books and gas and insurance, things that have affected virtually every family in Newfoundland and Labrador – I think most people would understand the need for us to take our share of the burden in order to move Newfoundland and Labrador forward and to position us for success, but that's not what's been done here. Everybody is feeling the pain, while this government increased spending.

Last year, we saw an increase in taxation and an increase in spending, and this year's spending levels are higher than they were in 2015. So the current government, the government that's been responsible for the last year and a half, has not tackled the tough issues. If it wasn't for \$500 million of additional oil revenue this year, we would have a real challenge. We see no vision, no plan and, therefore, people have no confidence that things are going to get better.

That's really disheartening. It's really disheartening when I talk to young people who are now planning to move away because they don't feel there will be opportunities for them here in the next number of years. We have entire families that are uprooting and moving elsewhere. It may be many, many years before they return, if they ever return at all. There was so much work done to bring people back here, to give people a reason to be hopeful, to give people opportunities to raise a family here, like I'm choosing to do, and build their futures here.

That's what everybody in Newfoundland and Labrador wants. We are a people that place an incredible value and importance on family; that's who we are. This budget and the lack of appropriate fiscal and economic policy by this government threaten that. It threatens our way of living; it threatens the quality of life for families. I'm not just talking about low-income families. I'm talking about middle-class families; I'm talking about all families in Newfoundland and Labrador.

So when I talk about issues like equalization and the fisheries investment fund and the fact that we're not getting our fair share, we are asset-rich but we have an immediate problem now due to some exceptional circumstances, Madam Speaker, was the point that I wanted to make –

exceptional circumstances, relatively short-term, that create a major challenge for the prosperity and the viability of Newfoundland and Labrador.

It doesn't have to be this way. This year, the Province of Nova Scotia will receive \$1.7 billion in transfer payments from Ottawa. This year, in 2017, the Province of New Brunswick will receive transfer payments of \$1.7 billion from Ottawa. This year, in 2017, the Province of Quebec, while cutting taxes, reducing fees and actually still running a deficit I believe – I'm not certain on that fact, Madam Speaker; I'm certain on the previous two facts. They will receive a transfer payment of \$11 billion from the federal government.

So I'm not saying let's be dependent on that source of revenue forever, but I'm saying let's recognize the exceptional circumstances that we find ourselves in. There's not an economist in this province, in the country, that predicted that oil was going to bottom out at \$27 a barrel. It would be great to get to a point where we're not so dependent on oil revenue, but the reality is that today we have a great dependence on oil revenue. There have been great efforts made to diversify the economy and that needs to continue. And we will get there. I believe we will get there, and there's a way to get there.

But to simply ignore reality and say, well, we just got to take what we're given, cap in hand, and be happy to receive whatever we receive, while other provinces get their fair share – if we were getting comparable treatment to Nova Scotia or New Brunswick – let's leave Quebec aside for a moment. If we were getting comparable treatment to Nova Scotia or New Brunswick when it comes to –

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

**MADAM SPEAKER (Dempster):** Order, please!

**MR. KENT:** – transfer payments from Ottawa, we essentially wouldn't have a deficit. We would not have a deficit. Our short-term cash problem, our short-term spending problem, there is a solution, and the burden doesn't have to simply rest with families in this province.

I'd like to move the following non-confidence motion related to this government and it's moved by the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island that all words after “that” be deleted in the motion before the House, and the following words be substituted: THEREFORE this House condemns the government for maintaining all but one of the 300 tax and fee increases they imposed on people in last year's budget, while failing to be forthright and accountable in disclosing information and while failing to nurture the conditions for economic growth across Newfoundland and Labrador.

Madam Speaker, we don't have confidence in this government; we don't have confidence in this government's leadership or their fiscal policy. I must move this non-confidence motion. It's seconded by the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island, and I ask for the House's consideration.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The Member for Mount Pearl North has moved a non-confidence motion and this House will take a brief recess to consider the motion.

### Recess

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

Are the Whips ready?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Yes.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** The Speaker has reviewed the motion and found it to be in order.

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

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

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

**MR. KENT:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I appreciate the wise and considerate ruling and I'm glad to have an opportunity now to continue my remarks.

For the purposes of those who may be watching the proceedings, we just moved –

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

**MR. KENT:** I can't hear, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. KENT:** We just moved a non-confidence motion to suggest that we do not have confidence in the fiscal policy of the current government and their budget. So this is a matter of confidence, and that's why we're taking the debate rather seriously, of course.

Just to conclude where I left off, we have a government now that likes to defend and apologize for the federal government instead of being an advocate for Newfoundland and Labrador. The shots being called from somewhere other than the Premier's office in this province is an approach that we find very, very concerning.

In my previous remarks this afternoon, I had an opportunity to talk about the Throne Speech and the lack of clarity in the Throne Speech and the lack of a clearer vision and plan to move Newfoundland and Labrador forward. I'd now like to shift to focusing on this year's budget. A number of words jump to mind when I thought about this year's budget and what impact it will have on people; what impact it will have on seniors; what impact it will have on families; what impact it will have on children and youth; what impact it will have on businesses; what impact it will have on communities and on our overall economy.

The Liberal approach that we see outlined in this year's budget, which is really an extension of last year's budget, very much so, words that come to mind about the approach include: weaken; the Liberal approach is to tax; the Liberal approach is to discourage; the Liberal approach is to blame; the Liberal approach is to panic; the Liberal approach is to cave; and the Liberal approach is to hide.

First of all, the Liberal approach is to weaken. It will leave people worse off at the end of this year than they are now. In fact, some of those 300 new taxes and fees that came in last year's budget only came into effect in 2017. So it's only in 2017, in this current year, that people

and families will feel the full impact of last year's decisions and this year's affirmation of those previous bad decisions.

The Liberal approach is to tax. It fails to connect high taxes with low growth. The Liberal approach is to discourage. It fails to connect high uncertainty with poor performance. The Liberal approach is to blame. It blames the PCs, while at the same time relying on and pointing to PC achievements.

The Liberal approach is to panic. The Budget Speech included an astonishing admission about panic. The Liberal approach is to cave. It downloads our woes on the people instead of fighting for people, instead of standing up for people, instead of providing leadership and providing a plan and a vision to move Newfoundland and Labrador forward.

The Liberal approach is to hide. It hides the details instead of being transparent. We saw that in Question Period today. From four different Cabinet ministers in four different government departments, we heard the same response. We're not going to answer your question but when we have an Estimates Committee, which is part of the budget process, a few weeks down the road, ask your questions there and then maybe you'll get a response.

This is the people's House, Madam Speaker. On days the House is open, we get 25 minutes to ask questions of government ministers.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** On behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

**MR. KENT:** On behalf of the people of the province, absolutely.

For government ministers, one after another, in the same 25-minute Question Period today say oh well, you just got to wait until and Estimates Committee, we're not going to answer detailed questions about our budget now, that's crazy.

We identified an 88 per cent reduction in grants that relate to sector diversification and economic development. Other budget lines where other grants and funding related to business development and economic development, particularly in rural parts of our province, have

been cut substantially and the response of government is, well, ask the minister about it in Estimates and we might give you some more detail.

That's an offensive approach. The amount of arrogance that we saw displayed in that kind of approach today is really disappointing. The condescending answers from the Minister of Finance when challenged about the content of the budget, it's not okay, and people in Newfoundland and Labrador expect better. As an Opposition, whose job it is to hold government's feet to the fire, we expect better as well.

So back to my seven points, the words that jumped to mind – the Liberal approach is to weaken. So if you look at *The Economy* document that came out with this year's budget – it's on page 7 – you can see what kind of year the Liberals expect we will have, in their second year in office. Real GDP is forecast to decrease by 3.8 per cent. While other provinces have turned the corner and are growing, we will decline. That means fewer opportunities. That means less investment. That means fewer jobs. That means smaller incomes, and we've seen no plan to address any of that.

Capital investment is expected to decline by 7.8 per cent. That's the investment that drives growth. That's investment that drives spinoff opportunities. That's the investment that drives jobs.

Employment is expected to be down 1.9 per cent from 2016. Employment rates on this government's watch are plummeting. The unemployment rate is expected to increase by 0.5 percentage points to average 13.9 per cent. That's on top of the worst thing that happened in the past year.

Household income is expected to decline by 0.3 per cent due to lower employment in the province. Retail sales are expected to decline by 0.2 per cent. That's the sales that enable employers to hire. Because this government has almost worked hard to eliminate hope and confidence, they have ground the economy to a halt. Consumers have stopped spending because of the uncertainty that this government has created around the economy, around their own

job prospects and around their families own futures.

Consumer prices are expected to increase by 2.9 per cent. That's inflation. It makes it costlier to live here in Newfoundland and Labrador. The province's population is projected to decline by 0.5 percent. That's hardly surprising when opportunities are falling. It's not population growth. We had a Population Growth Strategy. We still have a lot of work to do; there is no doubt about it.

I, for one, have been happy to hear the Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour talk about immigration as a priority. I believe it has to be a priority, and it's consistent with the Population Growth Strategy we had in place, but jobs are important too. Growing the economy is important too.

It is fine to talk about we need people to come here, and we do – the only way to make Newfoundland and Labrador sustainable and for us to become self-reliant in the future is to bring more people here and to have more people choose to live here and stay here. But there has to be jobs. There's no reason for people to come if they cannot make a living and sustain themselves here and contribute to the economy. So that has to be the focus. This government is certainly not focused on job creation when you look at these projections.

Housing starts are forecasted to decrease by 3.4 per cent. That's an activity that drives many spin-off industries and supports many jobs, and it's in decline as well.

These indicators show an economy that's worsening, not growing, and it's not a good sign. It doesn't show a government making conditions better. It shows the government presiding over a shrinking, a worsening, a declining of opportunities and people's quality of life. At the same time, they're further diminishing hope and confidence and not providing any kind of vision and plan to move Newfoundland and Labrador forward. That's not what they promised. It's not what they were expected to deliver, and I think that's why people are so disappointed and so angry.

This is their second budget, approaching two years in office. This is their watch. They are not turning things around. They are making things worse.

The second word that comes to mind is tax; the liberal approach is to tax. The lazy way to make a revenue shortfall is to take money from consumers and employers, and that's what the Liberals chose to do last year and that's exactly what the Liberals are choosing to do again this year. This budget is not a better budget; it's the same budget, the same 300 taxes and fees that were introduced last year, with an adjustment to one of them.

The Budget Speech this year states: "Our government made hard choices and asked taxpayers to dig deep into their pockets so we could close the gap between our revenue and our costs." That wasn't a hard choice for the government; it was a lazy choice and a misguided choice. Unfortunately, it's left consumers with fewer choices because they have less income to spend.

Families, consumers, face difficult choices like which bills to pay first and which important things to do without. Last year, the government raised more than 300 taxes and fees. This year, they are leaving all but one of them in place on people's backs. The one they're reducing is being only gradually and partially reduced before they re-impose it in some form in 2018 as a carbon tax.

We had a robust Climate Change Action Plan and it makes sense to continue to pursue it. We have to wrestle with the best way to approach tackling climate change and dealing with the issue of carbon tax. When we look at the impact on people and families, and this year's budget celebrates slightly reducing the gas tax when next year we're going to face a carbon tax, it's a little disingenuous, Madam Speaker.

So when we hear government celebrate no new or increased taxes that kind of rings a bit hollow when there's little left that isn't already being taxed at a higher rate than when the Liberals came to office in 2015.

So let's revisit the tax announcement that was in the 2016 Budget Speech, so just a year ago – and

bear with me while I share some of what we heard last year, keeping in mind the reason this is relevant is that all of this, with the exception of a slight reduction to the gas tax, is still in this budget that we're now debating and that was presented last week by the Finance Minister.

It reads as follows: "A series of new or increased tax measures and fee changes are being implemented today. During our consultation process, input from Newfoundlanders and Labradorians clearly pointed to increasing taxes and fees as a way to address the unprecedented fiscal situation. Total revenue in 2016–17 will be \$647 million annualizing to \$882 million.

"Effective April 15, tobacco taxes will increase by one cent per cigarette and by two cents per gram on fine-cut tobacco products, raising additional revenue of \$5.5 million.

"Several tax changes will take effect July 1, 2016.

"To increase revenues by \$204 million annually, it is necessary to increase Personal Income Tax rates for all income ranges. However, Newfoundland and Labrador rates remain competitive in Atlantic Canada.

"The HST rate will increase 2 percentage points, generating, on an annual basis"—

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

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. KENT:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's rather hard to hear today. I know they may not like what I have to say, but it needs to be said.

So again quoting from last year's Budget Speech: "The HST rate will increase 2 percentage points, generating, on an annual basis, \$224 million.

"The Retail Sales Tax on Insurance Premiums is being re-introduced at a rate of 15 per cent and will generate annualized revenue of \$111 million.

“The Insurance Companies tax will increase by 1 percentage point, increasing revenues annually of \$16.9 million.

“Effective January 1, 2016, the Financial Corporations Capital Tax Rate and the general corporate income tax rate, will increase 1 per cent and the Manufacturing and Processing Profits Tax Credit will be eliminated, generating additional annual revenues of \$31.8 million.

“Another measure our government is implementing is fee changes – on an annualized basis, total fee changes are projected to raise an additional \$19.3 million, this includes the introduction of 50 new fees and the modification of a further 300.”

Now, I won't read the fee changes document from last year's budget because it's 13 pages long, but keep in mind the reason this is so important is that when people talk about, well, this budget wasn't as bad as we thought, 100 per cent of this is still in place. Some of it is only coming into effect fully this fiscal year, with a slight reduction to gas tax later this year.

So it continues: Temporary tax measures. “Our plan will ensure Newfoundland and Labrador will not face these fiscal challenges forever. That is why, through Budget 2016, we are implementing some temporary tax measures.

“A Deficit Reduction Levy of up to \$900 annually, depending on taxable income will be implemented. Individuals with a taxable income of \$20,000 or less will be exempt. That levy will come into effect July 1, 2016. Revenue from the temporary tax will be \$74.8 million in 2016-17, annualizing to \$126 million.

“In 2018 we will begin the phase out of this temporary tax.

“Effective June 2, 2016, gasoline tax will temporarily increase by 16.5 cents per litre.” That's more than the reduction that was just announced that's coming later this year. “This tax increase will be reviewed ahead of the Fall 2016” –

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

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

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

I hope the mic is picking up some of the noise in the Chamber this afternoon. It's hard to hear myself over here.

“This tax increase will be reviewed ahead of the Fall 2016 supplemental budget.” I note that never even came. This budget was so devastating that government even shied away from presenting a supplemental budget, as previously committed last fall.

“The tax rate on diesel products will also increase, by 5 cents per litre and the tax rate on aviation fuel will go up 1.8 cents per litre. Taxes on Home Heating fuels will not change. Total projected annual revenue from these measures is \$142.8 million.”

I provide all of that context because it matters. It matters to the people who are affected by that level of taxation, and it's all still in place. With a minor adjustment to the levy and a minor adjustment to gas tax that's coming in the future, it's all still in place. So we have a budget that leaves people in Newfoundland and Labrador under the crushing burden of taxes. That burden has actually become worse this year, with some taxes just kicking in. Other tax hikes could come at the municipal level, as towns struggle to meet the new formula rules. And we are hearing from municipal leaders from around the province who have some concerns about some of the changes that have been made.

Money out of the pockets of consumers is money that they cannot spend to drive local growth. Money out of the pockets of employers is money they cannot spend to hire and to invest and to boost competitiveness. So why are retail sales down? Why are housing starts down? Who has the money? Gas tax, sales tax, book tax, income tax, the levy, insurance tax and I can go on and on, these things have really driven up the cost of living for all families, regardless of your income level.

Gas and insurance tax hikes have driven up the cost of freight and essentials like food. It impacts people severely. Stores are closing up, from small towns to Water Street, St. John's. High taxation is a policy that stymies growth at a

time when stimulus is needed. When a government cuts, you want the private sector picking up the slack. The irony is that when you raise taxes too high, people have so little left to spend, that tax revenues fail to meet expectations. Revenues fall short. You can't bleed a turnip.

It's a general difference of philosophy between Liberals and Tories. Liberals like to tax and spend, as we saw last year and as we see this again year. Tories see tax cuts as stimulus. As our revenues grow, we cut taxes, which we did. Liberals faulted us for abandoning revenue and giving tax breaks we could not afford. We believe overtaxing is fundamental wrong, and it's bad for the economy and it's bad for families.

So my advice to government is, take your hands out of the pockets of people and people will spend the money they keep. They will drive local growth and generate the kind of activity we need. That growth will help turn the economy and ultimately revenues around.

The Liberal approach is to discourage. Soon after the change in government in 2015, the Premier and some of his ministers announced a series of initiatives to rein in spending. People talk about our spending record. Government did grow on our watch – I've said so publicly – and there were steps made in the latter years of our mandate to get that back in line and to reduce the size of the public service. But if you look at the spending increase that happened during the 12 years of PC government, and the previous 15 years of Liberal administration, the actual increase in spending was far higher on Liberal watch than it was on PC watch.

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

**MR. KENT:** And unlike the Liberal government, we had a plan. We were reducing the size of the public service. We did reduce government spending and we did have a plan to reduce the size of the public service further through attrition. Not through haphazard layoffs, not through random cuts so you can create space for your Liberal friends, that wasn't our approach. That didn't happen on our watch, but that's what we've seen over the last year and a half.

So back in the fall of 2015, we were warned that it was going to be all doom and gloom, despite all the election promises of sunshine and rainbows, and a stronger tomorrow. Since that time, an axe has been hovering over the heads of the entire public service, and over people who rely on programs and services.

Threats of tax hikes and other restraint measures have been looming alongside the axe. In the end, the government did slash many jobs and perhaps more are waiting to be slashed. In Question Period today, we asked about \$70 million of cuts to agencies, boards and commissions, and the Finance Minister refused to tell us what those cuts relate to. That's more jobs, that's more families affected, and that is more impact on government programs and services.

Threats of tax hikes and other restraint measures have been looming alongside the axe, and in the end government did slash many jobs, as I said. If you cut 100 jobs, that's 100 people who no longer have the income to spend. But if you hold the threat over the heads of tens of thousands of employees, all of whom are uncertain about what lies ahead for them, then it isn't just 100 people who stop spending, it's tens of thousands; and therein lies the issue with the lack of a plan and the secretive nature that we're seeing, wait for Estimates to ask your questions about the budget, a budget that's going to be devastating for people and for families in this province.

So imagine the impact of tens of thousands of the province's employees restraining spending because of uncertainty about their future. Then imagine what businesses do when they feel that same chill descending on the economy. Do they hire? Do they invest? Do they expend or do they put their plans on ice, hold back and wait?

In a climate that's been created by the Liberal government of perpetual uncertainty, the economy ratchets back from growth to suspension and plans are in limbo. In an economy if you aren't moving forward, you're moving backward and that's the irony of the Liberal's latest series of documents, *The Way Forward*. We're actually slipping backward. We're actually slipping downward, losing ground that we spent a decade gaining.

We used to lead the country in economic growth; now we lead the country in economic decline. A climate of fear and uncertainty is a large part of the reason. Confidence has been undermined. Fear and apprehension is contagious and it's toxic for growth. Investors flee from a discouraged economy. They put their money elsewhere.

Prophecies of doom, Mr. Speaker, become self-fulfilling. People who expect the worst end up doing worse. There's been no hope or no optimism in our economy since the fall of 2015. It's been entirely doom and gloom, with threats of more bad things to come. The climate for growth needs optimism and confidence, which is entirely lacking. It's been wiped out under the Liberal administration.

So the next word that comes to mind about the Liberal approach is blame. Their approach is to blame. It's a mark of immaturity when you spend all your time finding others to blame for your own challenges and inadequacies and failures. The Liberals have been in blame mode for so long that they don't know another way to behave, as you're hearing from the noise opposite this afternoon. Every speech, every document and even the Throne Speech of all places that the Lieutenant Governor had to sit in your chair is full of blame.

The Budget Speech continues and the line is as follows, on page 1: "The magnitude of the fiscal challenge that we inherited cannot be understated." The blame attitude has become so pervasive that the Liberals have come to believe their own rhetoric and they've gone nose blind to it, while others are just shaking their heads. Blame your parents is what teenagers do, not responsible adults – and not all teenagers, I should say.

Even one journalist who ought to know better got into the blame game on budget day. He tweeted: NL PCs are like the foxes who ate the chickens and now complain there are no eggs. It's funny, it's amusing, it got lots of likes and retweets –

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

**MR. KENT:** – and you can see from the childish behaviour opposite, but it's not accurate, Mr. Speaker. They don't want to hear the truth. There were plenty of eggs in this year's budget that came from the chickens that the Tories –

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

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

**MR. KENT:** – cultivated. In fact, if it weren't –

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

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

The level of volume has escalated to an unacceptable level in the House of Assembly and I'd ask all hon. Members to take notice and they'll get an opportunity to speak. Right now, the hon. Member for Mount Pearl North has the floor.

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

That might be funny, but it's not accurate. There were plenty of eggs in this year's budget that came from the chickens that the Tories cultivated. In fact, if it weren't for the goose of Nalcor laying the golden eggs of oil revenue, the Liberals wouldn't have had anything positive last week to write about.

Tory investments in the Energy Plan produced the gains the budget was celebrating. The Premier says Tories were addicted to oil and oil is not a policy, as if oil is something bad about our economy. But where would we have been in this year's budget without an oil production and revenue windfall to save the Liberals from the catastrophe their first budget nearly created? Oil may have just saved the province from a credit rating downgrade, and I know there are certain political hopefuls projecting a credit rating downgrade. We will see. Time will tell.

The budget also finally admits that Muskrat Falls will not double electricity rates; something that we have said from the very beginning, and now they are finally admitting it. The CEO of Nalcor is now admitting it. At some point in the future, people will realize that all the blame and boondoggle talk of the Liberals about Muskrat



Falls was misplaced, and it was actually a sound investment in our long-term future. Sound environmentally, economically, fiscally and socially.

In the meantime, we will acknowledge that the Liberals have started making the slow turn toward calling the project positive, with all the good things that have been appearing of late about the project in the Nalcor and the budget documents; \$12 million dollars a week in activity that's boosting our economy, not depressing it. At some point, we expect hear the Liberals taking credit for the project, as they do with lots of initiatives that they weren't necessarily involved in. We don't expect the Liberals to stop blaming us from running the economy into the ground when, in fact, we did the opposite; when, in fact, all the economic indicators that I listed previously prove that we did the opposite.

What about spending the oil revenue windfall, wasting money, driving expenditure growth beyond the level we could afford? What about health spending exceeding the national average while delivering some of the worst outcomes in the country? The facts tell the opposite story.

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

**MR. KENT:** Before the Atlantic Accord, we were lagging the country in all measures of social and economic performance. We were the poor cousins of Confederation. But when we turned the corner, we decided that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador should reap the benefits. Why should we endure the worst child poverty rate in the country, the longest health care wait times for health care, large class sizes for our students, inadequate child protection and so forth? We made poverty reduction a priority and achieved the country's lowest rate of child poverty within a decade. That wasn't a waste of money, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. KENT:** We achieved some of the best health care outcomes in the country, meeting or exceeding national benchmarks in a number of areas. Now, that's not to say we are doing a great job when it comes to health outcomes. We have ton of work to do, and one of the things

that the Minister of Health and I wholeheartedly agree on is that we need to get better outcomes, we need to provide better care for people and we need to get better value for money in the health care system, no doubt.

As of September of 2015, when our government was last in office, just to give you a couple of examples: 87 per cent of knee replacements happened within the national benchmark time; 92 per cent of hip fracture repairs; 94 per cent of hip replacements; 96 per cent of cataract surgeries; 98 per cent of coronary bypass surgeries; and 99 per cent of curative radiotherapy – figures from the minister's own departmental website.

If we have relatively high health spending costs per capita, it may just be because we have a relatively old population and the cost of providing health care to those aged 15-64 in Canada is less than \$3,000 per person, but the cost for those over 65 is more than \$11,000 per person.

We're not afraid to talk about our record. We created new spaces for long-term care. We were also making great gains in student performance. We lead the country in post-secondary accessibility – I suspect we still do.

We made phenomenal gains in child protection and public protection. These thing cost money. They drove the hiring of social workers and police officers and teachers and nurses and doctors, and I don't think any of those things are a waste of money. Those things cost money, and the Liberals didn't oppose those investments at the time. In fact, they called for us to do even more.

So we resisted the call to grow beyond our means and we imposed attrition measures and other choices to rein in spending growth. At the same time, we continued to invest in infrastructure, growth industries, rural diversification, research and development and business attraction. Those things cost money as well.

Some investments are generators of growth that may produce huge dividends in the end. Some simply improve people's lives. So which of them do they oppose now? I would ask

Members opposite, which services did your constituents get that they didn't deserve? Which child should have been in a larger or mouldier classroom or gone to class hungry? Which senior should have waited longer in an acute care bed before getting long-term care?

Which person should have waited longer for surgery? Which person should have gone without medication? Which child should have been denied social services? Which families should have had to live in fear for lack of police officers or adequate firefighting equipment? Which volunteer firefighter should have been denied a tax credit? Which poor person should have been denied dental care or a health card when getting their first job? Which woman should have been denied a room at a shelter? Which district should have tolerated rutted roads?

Which town should still be breathing smoke from waste incinerators? Which business should have been denied the investment they needed to expand and create jobs? Which South Coast aquaculture worker should have been denied a job and a future at home? Which cranberry farmer should have been denied funding to grow? Which displaced forestry worker should have been denied assistance to cope with the loss of a job? Which post-secondary student would you have forced into deeper debt?

Because, Mr. Speaker, that's actually what it comes down to. That's not waste. That's not mismanaged money. It's about services to people; it's about investments in growing our potential. Our province and people were struggling when we took office because of years of straggling the country and neglect.

Instead of kicking the can down the road, we took ownership of the challenge and we developed a long-term strategy. We had a rolling plan, constantly being updated with new targets, adjusted to reflect the ever-changing reality of commodity prices, the ever-changing reality of exchange rates and transfer amounts, revenue amounts, growth figures and so forth.

Let's talk about equalization. First, we had to replace the equalization that we suddenly stopped receiving. That was \$10 billion. If the Liberals want an accounting of how that \$10

billion was spent over the last eight or nine years, then let them tell us first how they spent the \$10 billion they got from equalization every eight to nine years, because it's the same money. Now it's coming from oil instead of from Ottawa.

Let's talk about the infrastructure deficit. We took on the infrastructure deficit. When people talk about wasted money, you need to consider the infrastructure investments over the last 14 or 15 years. What if we hadn't taken on that infrastructure deficit? Is there a Member of this House who would volunteer to say that her or his district's infrastructure investments were money squandered – anybody? I'd highly doubt it, Mr. Speaker. The sum total of those infrastructure investments on our watch: \$6 billion.

Let's talk about Labrador – because we hear the Member for Labrador West who hasn't been named this afternoon but is continuously squawking, like the Member for Virginia Waters – Pleasantville. Let's talk about Labrador. Let's talk about the Northern Strategic Plan; some of it is included in the infrastructure envelope. Because of that \$5.5 billion that went to services for Northerners, particularly Labradorians – would anybody say that that money was misspent or wasted? Of course not; if anything, more was required, which is why we were committed to doing more in the northern parts of our province and doing more in Labrador.

Let's talk about pension plan liabilities. The Liberals speak of debt. Well, here's the debt inherited from the past. Did we take care of our debts? Absolutely, \$3.6 billion to address pension plan liabilities. So that was a large part of our Atlantic Accord legacy: funded pension plan liabilities.

Let's talk again about poverty reduction; we invested \$1.2 billion. Now, some could say that's money squandered, I suppose, if you're a heartless right winger who believes people's poverty is their own fault, but I don't believe that. I don't believe that for a moment. People in Newfoundland and Labrador, by their consistent generosity, prove that addressing poverty is absolutely a provincial priority.

Were we right to do this? Liberals mocked us, as they are doing today, when we set out to achieve the lowest rate of child poverty in the country in a decade, but we achieved our goal and those investments made that possible. How many of those investments are now on the chopping block?

Post-secondary access, tuition freeze and student aid – we have some former student leaders in our midst. Would they like to speak up and tell us how this money was squandered, an investment of \$350 million? So some people think it was money poorly spent. We don't, Mr. Speaker. We don't think it was money poorly spent at all.

We think our province is stronger because of those investments and our young people's opportunities are brighter because of those investments. Well, let's talk about tax relief; \$4 billion was invested – why? Because people with extra dollars in their pockets tend to spend a lot of it locally, driving growth in their local communities. So some people don't believe in tax relief, but our people bore high taxes for generations and the relief was a welcome relief.

Let's talk about public service investments: \$1.5 billion; some of this was salaries and some of it was new positions, but it was also about smaller classrooms and more social workers and more police officers and shorter wait times for medical treatment.

We were a province in deep disparity, so obviously when you make up ground, the rate of spending growth is going to be high. So you have to decide: Are we content to live in disparity forever or, when we reach special gains, should we invest some of those gains in reducing the disparities of services that our people endure?

We believed in spreading the benefits of our oil wealth to people, to people who serve, by providing fair wages and benefits, and by the people who are served by providing a higher standard of services. It isn't money wasted, Mr. Speaker, when it enhances the quality of life in our communities and makes them better places to live and better places to raise families.

Tax relief stimulated growth. Tuition relief stimulated growth. Business and innovation investments stimulated growth. Poverty reduction helped people achieve personal self-reliance. Pension plan investments addressed our indebtedness. Infrastructure investments addressed the infrastructure deficit we inherited and prepared us for growth, provincially and municipally.

So let me summarize: equalization replacement, \$10 billion; infrastructure strategy, \$6 billion; tax relief, \$4 billion; public sector wage and benefit growth, \$1.5 billion; pension plan liabilities, \$3.6 billion; poverty reduction, \$1.2 billion; Northern Strategic Plan, which overlaps with infrastructure, \$5.5 billion; tuition freeze and student aid reform, \$350 million. So where did the money go? That's where it went, Mr. Speaker. So which of these would the Liberals not have funded?

What some call costs, we like, at many times, to call investments. Investments in infrastructure improve our competitiveness and climate for growth, while improving the lives of people and driving employment along the way. We invested billions in infrastructure and it wasn't money wasted. So are we to blame for improving public services, public infrastructure and economic growth? Yes, I will stand here and take the blame for that, if blame is the word.

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

**MR. KENT:** It's easier to call it taking credit, but it's what people wanted, it's what people needed and it's what people deserved.

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

**MR. KENT:** The Constitution of Canada guarantees all Canadians in all provinces have the right to enjoy reasonably comparable levels of public service at reasonably comparable levels of taxation. We think the disparity that we endured for decades was unreasonable. Once we were lucrative, we were happy to correct that. We didn't invest in a legacy fund – not yet.

We took Norway's approach when they started reaping energy sector gains after having been a poor coastal state for so long. They invested in people first and then, 25 years later, they started

their Legacy Fund. So we are on track for that. We were committed to doing so and we were, in many ways, following their lead. This year's budget proves our careful long-term planning approach actually has worked, in some ways. We are reaping the gains of what we started. Our plan was so sound that it is unfolding, even despite the Liberal bungling in other sectors.

So instead of the nonsense that we are hearing from Members opposite today, instead of blaming us for messing up, the Liberals ought to be crediting us for doing the right thing and building on the choices we made, which we are prepared to stand and talk about, and prepared to defend. They ought to recognize that our approach was working and emulating it – because faulting us and having no real strategy or no real plan or no real vision and really poor leadership is certainly not working.

I would encourage Members to show a little bit of maturity and respect for this House. I would encourage them to stop blaming. I would encourage them to get back on course, and I would encourage them to start building again. That is something that I think all Members in this House could support.

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

**MR. KENT:** Another Liberal approach, another word that jumps to mind is “panic.” There was an astonishing line in the Budget Speech and it was right on page 1. “In last year's budget, with only four months in office, we knew that unless we increased revenue, we could not pay for basic programs or services. Without the measures taken our province would have faced serious challenges with rating agencies and banks. Some believed that it could have even led to bankruptcy. Our government made hard choices and asked taxpayers to dig deep into their pockets so we could close the gap between our revenue and our costs.”

Notice the part of “with only four months in office.” Notice the word “bankruptcy.” The tone conveyed by these sentences is one of panic. We should be, we can be, we will be the wealthiest, the richest, the most prosperous place in Canada. We have lots of assets. We do have a cash challenge. We are dealing with extraordinary circumstances – one-time circumstances based

on the decline in natural resource revenue. But when you talk about bankruptcy, the tone conveyed by these sentences is one of panic.

The Premier's constant blame narrative usually goes something like this: The previous government knew the true state of the province's finances before the election, but chose to hide it. If only we'd have known, we would have never put so many goodies in our red book. Once we got elected and saw the books, the true horror set in and we realized that drastic action would be needed.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier sat in this hon. House, he went through multiple budget processes, nothing was hidden. The trajectory of oil prices was reported daily around the world and the situation was clearly documented – it was all laid out in the 2015 budget, along with a frugal course of action to deal with the revenue shortfall decisively according to an actual plan.

The Liberals decided to throw caution to the wind and promised more than they could afford to deliver. Panic was their way to curb expectations once they realized they would have deliver on their promises. Panic has also been their approach in dealing with public sector unions. They hired a panic response team before negotiations started in earnest. They hired McInnes Cooper and a communication specialists, a good friend of the Finance Minister.

The problem with panic as a policy is that it doesn't give people confidence in your ability to govern. The credit rating agencies saw the panic and issued warnings and downgrades, all citing the lack of a long-term planning approach to the challenges. Panic and planning are mutual enemies. When you put on your panic face, it's hard to convince people that you actually have a plan.

In this budget, this budget which we are now debating, which is actually much like last year's, it is not a correction of that attitude. It's still about panic instead of about planning. It's still wait and see if another shoes has to drop.

The Finance Minister even lamented that she wishes she had been minister sooner – and thank goodness for all of us that she wasn't.

The credit rating agencies responded positively to our approach, even though it did include some immediate borrowing to bridge us across the worst period. It was the Liberal panic that brought the credit rating downgrades, which raised the cost of borrowing and cost taxpayers more money. Imagine the interest payments of borrowing in a market in which you are considered a risky investment because you have a tendency to panic rather than plan.

The credit rating agencies see this administration as one prone to panic. It gives them the jitters, hence the downgrades. At least the Budget speech is somewhat honest in portraying the panic for what it is. The first step in moving from nervousness and anxiety to prudent planning is to recognize the problem.

So we hope that the minister will reflect on the failure of her approach and start thinking about a more even-handed, progressive planning kind of approach. As a former Progressive Conservative, maybe she can dig down deep and acknowledge that there's a new kind of even-handed, progressive planning approach needed. So stop scaring people with words like bankruptcy and get on with developing the long-awaited plan.

The next word that comes to mind about the Liberal approach is "to cave." Quebec is complaining that they're getting only \$11 billion this year from the equalization program. You have to acknowledge the gall it takes to make this case with no sense of shame. If only we had a premier with a fraction of the gall.

While Quebec is fighting for more, our Premier is to be satisfied with less. So who's getting equalization in 2017 and 2018? Mr. Speaker, \$319 million for Prince Edward Island; \$1.7 billion for Nova Scotia; over \$1.7 billion for New Brunswick; over \$11 billion for Quebec; \$1.5 billion for Ontario; \$1.8 billion for Manitoba; Newfoundland and Labrador: zero. So who's fighting for Newfoundland and Labrador? Who's making that case if not our own Premier? And the case has to be made in these extraordinary circumstances we find ourselves in, and no one in authority is making it.

Equalization was long a dirty word for our province because it represented the training

wheels we were perpetually wearing in Confederation. We were never self-reliant when we relied so heavily on that program, no doubt. But it's there for a reason. It's there for extraordinary circumstances like the ones we find ourselves in. As long as it's there, it needs to be applied fairly and justly in accordance with the terms of the Constitution that defines it.

The Constitution is very straightforward: a guarantee of reasonably comparative levels of public service at reasonably comparable levels of taxation. The three-year moving average is a fiction invented and imposed by a federal government. The Constitution of this country has no such caveats. Fall short, and equalization is supposed to kick in to safeguard the services and protect the people from excessive taxation.

Who would argue that our tax rates today are fair in the Canadian context? I don't think anybody would. Quebec is using equalization to improve services and lower taxes, and so are some other jurisdictions as well. So we're slashing services and maintaining extreme taxes. How is that fair and what is Canadian about that approach?

Who is going to speak up for Newfoundland and Labrador if it's not the Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador? His approach is not to do his job but to find someone to blame for his refusal to do his job. We're not to blame for his capitulation; that's on him.

The federal government imposed a rule in the last round. That was their choice. In any event, it was not at a time when we would have qualified for equalization because our revenues had not declined at that particular point. It's now, on their watch, that revenues are down. It's now that the services have been cut and the taxes have been raised. It's now that the fight needs to be waged, not in 2019 as they're proposing. The taxes are being borne by families right now, not down the road.

Economists and Liberal friend James Feehan, who I think got an appointment recently, has stated: "Despite institutionalized consultations with the provinces prior to renewals, equalization is a federal government program and the federal government alone determines the

formula and can change the formula as it sees fit, whether at renewal time or not.”

So who the premier in December 2015? Who refused to fight in 2016, saying it is what it is? And who is the premier in 2017? Who expects to be premier throughout 2018? Yet, no promise from this Premier even to talk until 2019 when Ottawa has the power to alter equalization unilaterally any time it wants.

Forcing our people and economy to bear the consequences of your failure to fight for them is wrong. Stand up and fight for fairness; that’s what we’re calling for. And do you know what? It might actually work.

Our case is strong and surely all parties in this province would support it, but failing to even try is a guarantee that nothing will change. Our people deserve tax relief. They deserve sustained services. We’re not second-class citizens in the country and if other provinces can use equalization to moderate taxes and improve services, then so should we.

When it comes to standing up to Ottawa, the approach of the Liberals is to capitulate, to surrender, to concede, to acquiesce, to yield, to give up, to cave in, to knuckle under, to succumb and to obey. The comfortable chesterfield diplomacy of the Liberals –

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

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

**MR. KENT:** – is not delivering for Newfoundland and Labrador –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** It is not funny.

**MR. KENT:** I don’t find it funny. It’s fine for Members to think that this is all a big joke and to clown around, but the comfortable chesterfield diplomacy of the Liberals is not delivering for Newfoundland and Labrador, not on the fisheries investment fund, not on ocean technology, not on equalization, not on health transfers, not on the carbon tax, not on anything – and our people are paying for the provincial Liberal’s failure and refusal to secure fairness from their federal cousins.

In the Liberal approach, Mr. Speaker, another word that comes to mind is “to hide.” This government was elected on a platform of transparency. ATTIPP was the Premier’s top priority when elected party leader. Transparency and accountability was the very first commitment of their election red book.

In last year’s budget, the stark implications of the cuts were laid out in great detail, in factsheets and lists. This year, in this year’s budget, part of our challenge and part of the reason for the questions today in Question Period is that the facts are sadly missing. What’s still to come? The buzz phrase on Budget Day was: The devil is in the details. When that’s the buzz phrase, you know that there is a transparency problem. People have a right to know. People also have a vested interest in uncertainty giving way to a clear path. Hiding things is a recipe for making things worse.

Suspended animation is not an economic growth plan. What health cuts are left to come, who knows – what education cuts. It is disappointing that the 2017 budget drives continuing uncertainty by leaving so many critical questions unanswered.

The Liberals identified \$283 million in so-called savings for the 2017-2018 fiscal years, without giving people any answers on where those saving will come from. They’re saying that over \$70 million of cuts will be taken from agencies, boards and commissions – but where; what will be cut and what will be impacted? When people don’t know, they can’t plan and they can’t properly adjust. So they hunker down and wait and their lack of confidence makes the challenges worse.

Mr. Speaker, uncertainty undermines confidence. Uncertainty undermines growth. Unfortunately, the cloud of uncertainty that has been hanging over the province like a dark cloud for the past 17 months is continuing to hang over everyone. When people have to ask what they are hiding, they also start asking why they are hiding it.

When people aren’t given the full story, they worry, particularly in light of the kinds of choices that the Liberals have been making for the past two years. Those choices like the front-

line service cuts, management cuts that have later been backfilled by friends, and crushing tax and fee increases, have left people wondering where the Liberals' heads are.

The Liberals keep saying, trust us. Well, do you know what? Trust has to be earned, and the Liberals haven't earned that trust. They betrayed people's trust. They've abandoned their promises and delivered the opposite of what people expect and what people need.

The full story of *Budget 2017* is yet to be told. There are more shoes to drop. This is not a fiscally responsible or open and transparent way to govern. We expected them to learn their lesson over the past 18 months, but they haven't. They seem to be playing games by spinning a story instead of being honest and upfront with the people whose lives their budget decisions will impact.

There is another way that the Liberals are hiding. Recall the table in last year's *Economy* document that showed their projection of more than 30,000 job losses in five years. The table also appeared in the fall fiscal update with similar projections. But in the 2017 budget, the numbers in the table have been significantly altered to boost all of the indicators in the next several years. Mr. Speaker, there's no justification for the improvements. In fact, the projections for 2017 remain dismal. It appears the Liberals have cooked the numbers in the table to hide the impact of their failed economic policies.

I only have a few minutes left. So the obvious question becomes: What would we have done? When Liberals ask what you would have done, they are being disingenuous. It's clear what we would have done by what we actually did. We governed for 12 years and we laid out our approach to the oil market collapse in *Budget 2015*. The reason we say the Liberals are being disingenuous is that they are trying to re-write the history of what we did and the impact on people, instead of assessing it honestly.

We invested in people; better health care services and outcomes; better education; better child protection; better public protection; poverty reduction' and issues from housing to helping people get off Income Support. We

invested in communities and regions through municipal sustainability partnership and regional growth and strategic diversification across all sectors: tourism, agrifoods, aquaculture, oceans, energy. We invested in enterprise growth, business attractions initiatives and trade, all to open up new opportunities and prepare our own people to seize them.

We invested in tax reduction so employers and investors and consumers would have money to spend because those are the choices that drive local growth. Not government spending people's money, but people spending people's money.

We invested in delivering government services more efficiently in ways that were streamlined. Reviewing and sunseting programs and replacing them with ones that works better; taking new approaches such as partnerships; repurposing and consolidating arms of governance, boards, commissions and divisions. We set fiscal targets with long-range plans to create more certainty to help with planning, to let our lenders know we were concerned about fiscal responsibility and determined to get back to balance.

The bond rating agencies acknowledged our reports, not with downgrades. The approach was comprehensive, complemented by strategic plans in all sectors, covering all the bases and setting objectives that allow performance to be measured and approaches to be adjusted in light of real results and feedback.

*The Way Forward* approach, the Liberal way forward approach mocks strategies, calling them a waste, saying they do nothing but build silos; but the results prove otherwise. Their alternative is to plan nothing and achieve nothing, and their economic projections prove their unplanned approach is leading the province to decline. Opportunities for growth are being squandered.

We invested in energy. The Liberals said we were addicted to oil and oil is not a policy. They said Muskrat Falls was a boondoggle and not their choice, even though several Members, including the Premier, voted for it.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** What?

**MR. KENT:** Yes. In fact, the current Minister of Finance was, at one point, the chair of the Nalcor board who led a campaign –

**MR. A. PARSONS:** A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

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

The Government House Leader, on a point of order.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** No, I just have to refer to the Member's comments about how the Premier voted for Muskrat Falls. That is, as far as I realize, factually incorrect and I think that has to be pointed out, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** I didn't hear the comment but if hon. Member for Mount Pearl North would like to address that comment.

**MR. KENT:** I'd like to get back to my remarks, Mr. Speaker, and hopefully I won't be interrupted further.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The Chair will take it under advisement.

**MR. KENT:** I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker.

The Energy Plan, our Energy Plan, is the only good news in their 2017 budget. They mock it, they criticize it and then they take credit for it, as they take in the returns from the approach we took. So what would we do, should be turned around to ask: Why won't you acknowledge the wisdom of our approach, the one that you are benefiting from right now?

Let's get back on track to growth, which is exactly what our approach was achieving, and away from the path to ruin, which is the one that the Liberals have now set us one.

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

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

**MR. KENT:** The Liberals will never get us back on track until they first acknowledge that the right track, the one that leads to the outcomes we need, is the track we were on.

Mr. Speaker, there are difficult choices always when you're governing, but a failure to make the right choices and a failure to present any kind of plan and any kind of vision, and the failure to have any kind of responsible approach to managing the economy and instilling some hope and confidence so that people will spend their money and build their futures here, it's really problematic. I'm glad to have an opportunity this afternoon to speak to some of these issues.

Our alternative approach would have been to make no unaffordable election promises, and that approach cost us dearly because we were fighting a fantasy wish book of promises. Our approach would have been to maintain the five-year plan, which included a HST credit to protect the vulnerable and an attrition plan to minimize hardship and uncertainty while managing government restructuring, which we had already started to roll out.

We also were intending to revisit our plan as oil prices fell, and our approach contemplated going back to the plan regularly to adjust spending to match the changing fiscal realities, up or down. Our approach was to continue to be honest with our plans and refuse to hide them.

Our approach would have been to govern openly and accountably, instead of blaming people for the measures they cherry-pick. Our approach would have been to be vigorous in holding Ottawa to account for its promises and its obligations to help Newfoundland and Labrador deal with the special circumstances, the extraordinary circumstances that we find ourselves in.

Ranging from CETA, the Fisheries Fund, which Prime Minister Trudeau committed to, health transfers, equalization reform, hand in hand with the other oil provinces, we wouldn't have caved in and we wouldn't have refused to fight, which is what we're seeing from this current government.

Our approach would have been to drive growth in the sectors that are able to pick up the slack so that we do continue to grow when oil revenues are in decline, and that would have led to a prosperous future, offering opportunities to youth, and we could sustain the gains we've



achieved and continue to secure our foundation for hope.

Our approach certainly involved investing to protect people from harm: seniors, youth, families, the vulnerable, rural communities, front-line workers and so on. So that path was not an easy one; it was a challenging one and a long one. It was already challenging in *Budget 2015* but it was a balanced approach, it was growth-oriented, it was focused on people and it was hopeful, not devastating.

Last year's budget in 2016 was devastating to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Mr. Speaker, this 2017 budget is equally as devastating. It's bad for people, it's bad for families and we'll fulfill our responsibility to continue to hold this government accountable for its lack of leadership and bad choices.

Thank you.

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

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

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

It's an honour for me to stand up and participate in the budget process, the 2017 budget, which I know the Member just spent his speech talking about last year's budget. I'm going to confine the majority of my time to speaking about this year's budget. For people who are watching the taping of the House of Assembly –

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

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

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

I know the Opposition Members don't want to hear – I know the Member for Mount Pearl North doesn't want to hear the government's side of the story. That's fine; I'll continue to talk though the yelling over there.

Mr. Speaker, for people who are watching this at home, we're going through a traditional budget process that the province has gone through every year. I'm now addressing the amended motion,

as amended by the Member for Mount Pearl North, which is practically the same as the motion that was made around this time last year on last year's budget. We will spend a lot of hours debating this budget, going through it in detail. We will have a committee process and so on so that the Opposition gets all the answers to the questions that they have.

Now, I just want to first take a couple of minutes to really address the shocking display that we just saw here on the floor of the House of Assembly, which is not really a big surprise if people watching at home are familiar with the Member for Mount Pearl North and the way that he tends to operate. When he got up, he talked about facts being hidden and people not having trust and maturity issues, immaturity.

He ended his commentary there by saying that the Premier had voted for Muskrat Falls, which is absolutely false. But that should not be really a surprise, considering the Member's record of incredibly bad judgement. Making things up and pretending that they're facts is not something that comes as a surprise, coming from the Member for Mount Pearl North.

He's always making things up and presenting them as facts. He's always personally attacking people. He got up there in his speech, not only did he mislead people by saying that the Premier voted for Muskrat Falls, he just attacked journalist David Cochrane in his speech. I understand Mr. Cochrane is aware of that. He just attacked a MUN economist, Dr. James Feehan, in his speech. He suggested he was recently appointed to the Oversight Committee for Muskrat Falls because of some partisan reason. I'm not aware of any partisan affiliation Mr. Feehan has. He's been equally critical of PC governments as he has of other governments. Again, it's not something that I'm surprised at, considering the way the Member for Mount Pearl North tends to invent history and basically spin these sorts of contrived conspiracy theories.

Let's just look back at the recent few days. The Member for Mount Pearl North on budget day was out there pretending on Twitter – because that's his chosen way to communicate with the rest of the world – communicating that the provincial government was somehow responsible for the Public Utilities Board

decision under the gas regulatory regime, that's been in place for over a decade, suggesting somehow that the gas tax is going down and, look, it's going back up and somehow implicating the government in that decision-making process.

That decision-making process is entirely independent of government. It has nothing to do with the gas tax. It has everything to do with the fact that the Public Utilities Board is responsible for that.

He's also out there talking about \$100 million –

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

**MADAM SPEAKER (Dempster):** Order, please!

**MR. KIRBY:** – in health cuts. He's out there frightening seniors, frightening people who are sick and in hospital by suggesting that there are all of these health care cuts coming. Then that wasn't the case and when that didn't materialize in the budget, he tried to explain that away in the most bizarre way – again, I'm still trying to figure out the logic. He was frightening the people of the Burin Peninsula out there again on Twitter, on Facebook, on social media, suggesting somehow that the Grand Bank health care facility and the St. Lawrence health care facility – his language was that they were going to be cut, and that's nowhere in any process here.

He asked those questions of the hon. Minister of Health and Community Services here in the House of Assembly and the minister basically said that it wasn't the case at all. On the day of the budget, he tweeted that there was 150 teaching positions being cut in the budget. Frightening teachers, frightening parents with information that is absolutely false, completely made up, misleading information.

The reason why the amount of money is different is perfectly explainable. Had the PC Party not kicked the officials from Finance out of their briefing that was set up for them, they kicked the officials out and just basically started making up fake information on the fly and sending it out into social media where people are reading it and taking it as true.

The reason why there's less money for teacher payroll in there is primarily because of our collective agreement with teachers, which requires government to pay teachers in 26 equal installments. So, more or less, it treats the year as though there are only 364 days in it, when we all know that there's another day in the year. As we go along every year, we gather up an extra few days so there's an adjustment in payroll at the end of August every four or five years. That's what happens. Teachers are well aware of that.

The NLTA had it in their current bulletin, but that didn't matter to the Member for Mount Pearl North – that didn't matter. The facts didn't matter at all. Just throw this information out and then not provide any clarification; misleading people about the price of gas; misleading people about health spending; misleading people about health care facilities closing or being cut; misleading people about the education system – and he wants to be premier. He wants to lead the province. I'm telling you, it's absolutely ridiculous, and that was only in a couple of days. That's only in a couple of days – unbelievable.

I tell you, I don't think we'd see that from Ches Crosbie, no. He thinks it's funny over there. He can laugh all he wants. I don't think it's funny at all and it's interesting that he – I was really pleased to see that *The Telegram* picked this up this week.

*The Telegram* wrote in their Cheers and Jeers section this week, they said: “Jeers: To the MHA who cries wolf.” They named the Member for Mount Pearl North “was busy in the lead-up to budget day tweeting dire warnings about government spending items he said were on the chopping block.” The Health Minister ‘and Liberals will cut over \$100 million from system next week without any real plan,’ he tweeted on March 30. The problem is, that wasn't in the April 6<sup>th</sup> budget. That's not to say health cuts won't come, but perhaps” he “would cause less anxiety and stress among health-care employees if he saved his pronouncements for when he actually had solid information. He isn't helping a tense situation by playing politics on social media when people have legitimate fears for their jobs.”

That's what *The Telegram* had to say about this, and *The Telegram* is quite right. We all have a responsibility in here to at least state the facts, not to make up things just for political convenience. Let's talk about the facts. Let's talk about the budget.

He more or less suggests there is no information available about this budget, talking about facts being hidden. The facts are in the budget documents. The PC Party decided to throw the officials from the Department of Finance out of their briefing. That was their decision. They could have had it all explained to them in minute detail, but they threw the officials out, and then the PC Party started making up information about what was in the budget. They were making up information about the gas tax, making up things about health care spending, making up things health care cuts and facilities being cut and making up information about teacher cuts. I really think the people of the province deserve better than that.

Regarding the business of the Member for Mount Pearl North and his consistent, personal attacks on people – we sort of have a tradition here in the House of Assembly about what is said and what is unsaid. So the Member goes on social media intentionally, sometimes while the House is sitting, and makes these sort of absurd statements and calls people names, calls other Members of the House of Assembly names – which you would never get away with in here because we are supposed to have some civil discourse in here. We have a stack of books there that governs our behaviour.

The Member for Mount Pearl North can't get away with that behaviour in here, so he goes to social media and he does it. Again, that's not a big surprise. It's actually somewhat ironic that he attacked David Cochrane, who is probably one of the better journalists that we have produced here in the province. He is now working in Ontario for CBC nationally. But it's interesting because it was only a few years ago when the Member for Mount Pearl North – it's funny, he is talking about basically misleading the people by saying the Premier voted for Muskrat Falls when everybody and the record shows that he didn't do that.

It was only a few years ago that David Cochrane took the Member for Mount Pearl North to task for his personal attacks. At that time, we were having a discussion about Muskrat Falls and the folly associated with Muskrat Falls. Because that will be their legacy – you don't have to worry about their legacy. Their legacy is sealed with Muskrat Falls. Our kids are going to have to pay for it and senior citizens are going to have to pay for it. It is a fiasco that we have never seen before. It makes the Upper Churchill look like a good deal. But that will be their legacy.

On this occasion, there was a group of prominent Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who had formed a group called the 2041 Group to oppose Muskrat Falls and to shed some light on it. He talks about hiding the facts. We sat over there on the House of Assembly for years and had misinformation on Muskrat Falls thrown at us on a daily basis from the Member for Mount Pearl North. He can remember it.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Deputy Premier, too.

**MR. KIRBY:** He was Deputy Premier; yes, that's absolutely true. When he was personally attacking the 2041 Group and casting all sorts of aspersions on their character, their motives, why they were criticizing the government; he talked about how one of them was only saying it because he had some sort of interest in natural gas and so on and so forth. David Cochrane said at the time: The level and tone of the personal attacks on these critics is undermining the argument for Muskrat Falls. PCs polluting the debate with smear. He was referring to the Member for Mount Pearl North at the time. Honestly, can't people discuss the pros and cons of a multi-billion-dollar hydro project without sinking to a junior high level?

I just like to say for the record, Madam Speaker, that I think that really is an insult to junior high school students myself. I've been in a lot of junior high school classes across this province since I became Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development and I have never seen anything from kids in our classes like that – which comes to another important point, because when you're here in these only 40 seats in the House of Assembly, it's such a privilege for us to be here.

Most people are out there working hard, sweating, working hard at their jobs, difficult jobs, uncertain jobs, uncertain time. Folks who aren't working are looking for work, people living in poverty, people taking care of family members have one issue of another and we're here in these seats having an opportunity to discuss the future of the province and debate the provincial budget and we have a responsibility to conduct ourselves in a way that is commensurate with the job that we're doing. There is a basic expectation out there in the public.

One of the problems that we have today in schools and in society, really, in general, is the whole issue of cyber bullying. We really saw that on full display last year when sock puppets for the PC Party on Twitter were doing all this stuff to the Minister of Finance. Some of it was verging on misogynistic, sexist, unbelievable, fat shaming, I don't know – it's disgusting behaviour that if it was going on in our school system, we would suspend those students from school. We would not tolerate that kind of behaviour from students.

Yet, we have the Member for Mount Pearl North who consistently goes on social media, makes things up, attacks people personally, calls them all sorts of names and he thinks it's funny. He thinks it's funny. I can hear the laughter over there. He thinks it's funny and I don't think it's funny at all. I think it's absolutely shameful behaviour to have somebody who was a Cabinet minister – I read one tweet one time that basically said who is the bigger sociopath, and had the Premier and me. This is a person who supposedly advocates for people's mental health, and that's the kind of stuff he is saying on Twitter – really.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** On the mental health committee?

**MR. KIRBY:** He's on the All-Party Committee on Mental Health and this is the sort of calling into question the mental competency of the Premier and ministers of the Crown – unbelievable.

I have to say I talk to people and it was interesting. After all of that stuff that went on last week in the lead up to the budget, this

business about the gas tax, the health spending, the health care facilities, the teachers, all that misinformation that the Member for Mount Pearl North was out there spreading – I was at the grocery store, out and about doing this, out in my district, and people saying to me what is it he is getting on with – what is it that's going on here?

It's interesting because people inevitably come back to a comparison. It's funny because if you pick up the current edition of *Rolling Stone* magazine, which I like to read, there's an article about Donald Trump in there. It says he invents history, spins conspiracy theories, and so on and so forth. And that's what people are saying to me. They're saying that's just like Donald Trump: spreading misinformation, false information, alternative facts, no accountability, name calling, personal attacks, getting down to that level. That's what people are saying to me, it's just the same as that, more or less.

I'm glad you brought that up there because I was going to say. As I said, the Member has displayed an amazing propensity for bad judgement and we've seen that on full display over and over again.

Somebody mentioned Kellie Leitch and I thought that was important because for the best part of last year, as far as I understand it – I could be corrected if I was wrong – the Member for Mount Pearl North spent his time supporting or endorsing Kellie Leitch who is running for the leadership of the Conservative Party federally. He withdrew that in the fall at one point.

He talks about how the Liberals are hiding and they're dodging or whatever. He was the one as soon as he was asked to be accountable for his endorsement of Kellie Leitch, then he acquiesced: Oh no, no. And here's Kellie Leitch running on what I would call an unabashedly anti-immigrant platform, same as the stuff we've seen from the far right in Germany, in the Netherlands, in the United Kingdom, now in France and in the United States. That same anti-immigrant sentiment is what Kellie Leitch brings and it is the sole thing that she brings to the political discourse in Canada today.

What an unsavoury character to be –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Associated with.

**MR. KIRBY:** – associated with.

And, again, like I said, these comments about Trump, not a real big surprise. Because, of course, on election night in the United States just last fall – and I'll be happy to say I supported Hilary Clinton.

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

**MR. KIRBY:** The Member for Mount Pearl North popped up on Twitter, sort of boastfully on the US election night, wearing basically a hat that's supportive of Donald Trump saying: Make America great again. And when he was challenged on that: Oh, no, no, I was only fooling. But it makes people wonder.

Like I said, people are wondering. Because when you read this business that was in *The Telegram* this week about the Member saying that he has a source that the Liberals are going to cut \$100 million from health care and he used to be the minister of Health, people have cause – considering his position as a Member of the House, a former deputy premier, a former minister of Health, he has cause to have some credibility, one would think.

But as *The Telegram* points out this week, he has a tenuous attachment to credibility and frightening the good people of Grand Bank and St. Lawrence, and other people on the Burin Peninsula, frightening seniors by waving this stuff around in this Trumpian way, no concern for the facts whatsoever.

Making things up, alternative facts, just like when he stood up over there minutes ago and said that the Premier of the province voted for Muskrat Falls which everyone knows is not the case. Then, when asked by the Government House Leader to retract the statement, no, continue on as if to what he had to say was actually the case.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Didn't have the time.

**MR. KIRBY:** No at all.

All these other things about the gas tax and the health spending and this absolutely false statement that he made about 150 teachers being cut: not at all the case. I explained why there is a reduction in that line item in the budget. They would have gotten that answer had they not have kicked the Department of Finance officials out of their boardroom, out of their conference room during the budget because they didn't want the facts.

And then they come into the House of Assembly here demanding that ministers over here answer the questions that they should have gotten last week when they were given a golden opportunity, and then the personal attacks. And I couldn't believe – I really couldn't believe; the Minister of Health is a former surgeon. And as the Member for Bay of Islands pointed out the day that all of this happened recently, to be basically on Facebook saying that the Minister of Health – and naming him by name – hasn't got a conscience.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Heartless.

**MR. KIRBY:** Heartless. I mean who says that?

The Minister of Health is a respected former physician in this province. He has worked up one side of her and all the way down the other side. People know his reputation as one of honour. Not what the Member for Mount Pearl North is throwing around when he's throwing mud at Ministers of the Crown and other Members of the House of Assembly.

His colleagues, I would add, when he's smearing them on social media, he should have better sense. Like I said, in his own speech he got up and he attacked Dave Cochrane in one minute and the next minute he discredited Dr. James Feehan, a respected economist at the province's only university.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Who was right about Muskrat Falls.

**MR. KIRBY:** Who was right about Muskrat Falls, by the way.

It's just a consistent approach that he takes that I think has to be called out. And I'm so happy that the good folks at *The Telegram* this week

decided to pick this up because it had to be said. It was about time that somebody raised this.

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

**MR. KIRBY:** Because these sorts of personal attacks, that he has continued since we had the Muskrat Falls debate to present – these sorts of personal attacks cannot stand. We have to have a more civilized conversation about the issues that impact people in this province than that. We have to have a much more civilized conversation.

And not only that, we cannot have Members of the House of Assembly using social media, using the floor of the House of Assembly for that matter, to mislead the good people of Newfoundland and Labrador. That is not permitted. We can't have that. People deserve more than that.

Like I said, there are only 40 of us. And I know the Members think this is funny over there. They're having a good old laugh over there. They think it's funny but I don't think that sort of abuse is funny. That is abuse of the position, and I think that's abuse of your colleagues and it's not funny at all. So I just wanted to say that for the record because it had to be said.

Now there's a lot of irony in some of the other things he had said. I know recently I had a good meeting with the folks from Witless Bay and Mobile about their schooling issue down there. It was so ironic because the Member for Ferryland asked me for the meeting and I have said time and again I'm willing to meet with any group, any school group. I lost count of the number of school councils, parents and others, teachers that I've met with. I've been to, I don't know, something like 50 schools probably over the course of my term so far.

Sometimes people are not happy but that's fine. That's the responsibility that we have to not make things up, to tell people the way that it is and to try to have a civilized way of coming to a reasonable conclusion for kids, for teachers, for schools, for parents.

There were two things that went on in that meeting. So basically the Opposition, when they were government, made about a quarter-billion

dollars' worth of school infrastructure announcements in the last budget that they had. It was a significant sum of money. New schools and all kinds of things that they never got around to doing when we were flush with cash they used to say, they never got around to doing these things.

So now it's my fault, now it's our fault that that didn't get done. So one of the things that were decided in the 2015 budget, which we have committed to, was that instead of building a new school in the Witless Bay-Mobile area for that family of schools, there would be an extension built on to Mobile Central High.

I have a press release here from January 2008, because I think history is highly instructive. The minister at the time, the hon. Joan Burke, minister of Education: There's certainly a buzz of excitement in and around Mobile Central High School, as students and teachers settle into their new surroundings. This is a great investment and we'll make sure the needs of Mobile and surrounding areas are served well into the future.

That's not 10 years ago. But this was their modus operandi in office. They built schools that were too small. The problem in the Witless Bay-Mobile area is that St. Bernard's Elementary and Mobile Central High are too small, and they built Mobile Central High too small.

**MR. JOYCE:** Who was the minister?

**MR. KIRBY:** The minister at the time was Joan Burke.

They also built schools that were too small in other areas. Holy Trinity Elementary was replaced around the same time. That school has eight modular, temporary, portable classrooms behind it. That's how small that was built. They built schools that were too small and now it's our fault that they built them too small. I don't think so – I don't think so.

So we had this meeting – I was happy to accommodate the Member for Ferryland and the school community and they said two things that were amazing. First, when we finished pleasantries, they said we're tired of not being

listened to by government. For years, we haven't been listened to. And here's the Member for Ferryland, their MHA – I think he sat around the Cabinet table for almost exclusively the whole time he was in here, in government. They were basically saying he never listened to us. We're tired of it. So I thought that was interesting.

The other thing was there was a number that they put on the new school, and probably officials in the department don't want me to say it, but I have to say it for the interest of transparency. The number was about \$27 million. That was the cost of the new school. To build the extension that they failed to do, to make Mobile Central High big enough, requires significantly less money. Let's just say it's tens of millions of dollars less to do this work. So we're doing this because it's cheaper for the taxpayer and he's demanding a \$27 million school. So he looks at me and he said: Where did you get that number at? I want you to explain that number. It's the number they came up with.

Now I'm responsible for explaining the figure they put in their budget in 2015. I don't think so. If you can't take responsibility for what you did during your time of office, don't, but don't point a finger at me saying explain what I did. Tell me where I got that number at. I don't know – in fact, I say to everybody watching at home, we're not allowed to have information on Cabinet decisions made by previous governments. But they're like tell us what we did. We don't know what we did, please.

Mr. Speaker, I have to read this to you because – and I only have a few minutes left, I'll try to keep it short here. If you listen to the doom and the gloom coming from the other side all the time in Question Period, it is hard to listen to. I already went through the stuff that the Member for Mount Pearl North puts on Twitter, all the personal attacks, all the misinformation, all that toxic stuff that people out there got no time for. He's only playing to a small, small audience and half of them are sock puppet accounts run by themselves.

We implemented full-day Kindergarten in order to catch up with the rest of the country. Prior to my joining the Liberal Party, I had a great meeting with the person that is now the Minister

of Finance. I was a bit of a charmer when I was in Opposition; there's no question about that. I'll level with you, I was. The Member was with the board of trade at the time and she went down to the board of trade – and I was so proud that day of this person I had never met. She got up in front of the board of trade and she talked about the need for better child care and the need for full-day Kindergarten, and how to give our children the best start they can get in life.

It is an honour for me to sit here next to her in the House of Assembly because, of course, immediately I tweeted great to have – I can't say her name; I said her name – along with us on this journey towards full-day Kindergarten. So she gets in touch with me and she said I don't know what it is you're talking about, but how about you and I have a meeting. We had a meeting and it never ended up being anything about full-day Kindergarten; it was mostly about what it's like to have a seat in the House of Assembly.

I started to put two and two together and now she has a seat in the House of Assembly. Actually, she had it very shortly after that. I was so proud of what she did. As a business person, she went out there and pointed out that we need to have this thing that we don't right now. And it was a risky thing to do, but I think it was a real courageous thing to do. We finished that journey this past year. For all the reasons, full-day Kindergarten helps with so many things: language development, basic language skills, cognitive development in children. All of the science around neuroplasticity and cognitive science and psychological development, all that shows the importance of an enriched early learning and care environment for kids at that crucial young age – the development of social competencies.

People can laugh, make fun, all of that, that's fine with me; but just merely learning how, when you're five, to spend a school day with other children and know what is civilized and what's not, what behaviour is acceptable, what's not, what you should say to the other people and what you should not, those social competency skills that they build in full-day Kindergarten and in high-quality early learning and care makes all the difference for children in the school.

They are better prepared for grade one as a result. Communication skills, general knowledge – there are data and in the research on full-day Kindergarten that's going on with McMaster University in Ontario that shows connections to writing, to literacy, to mathematics, all kinds of exciting things. It makes me happy that we managed to achieve this at a difficult time in the province's history. Our Cabinet and our caucus believe that we have to invest in our children, because they are going to be the ones that inherit the Newfoundland and Labrador that we leave them with.

I was disappointed that the Opposition parties took a position against full-day Kindergarten. I was incredibly surprised, considering my own political history, that the NDP would choose to drop its support for full-day Kindergarten, considering all of the rhetoric that we hear from the NDP around child care, but they just dropped it and abandoned it. They'll have to answer for that when we go to the polls again.

We know our kids are more successful in school as a result of full-day Kindergarten but don't take my word for it. I got this email on the weekend – and here's the other thing too. If you listen to the Members opposite, it's all dire, it's all negative, it's all bad, whatever. I got this email Saturday. This person must have been up late because it was the wee hours of the morning Saturday morning past. I have to read this because it really says so much. I just want to remind everybody, remember the things that we know about full-day Kindergarten, about the identification and support of children who have special education needs. I get a lot of messages from people and it's really mixed. I think if you get into politics to be slapped on the back, then you're probably going into the wrong line of work.

I get really positive message from parents about full-day kindergarten but this one is just from last weekend and it really put the hook in me. She says: I got a message from an acquaintance on Facebook the other day. She knew my child had special needs and she was doing some sort of focus group and asked what questions I wish that my son's school had asked to make his experience in school, in full-day kindergarten,

easier and more accommodating. I thought about it. In all honesty, I couldn't think of anything.

This parent could not think of anything to change to make her son's experience in school easier and more accommodating – couldn't think of anything. This is today's education system.

I thought about it and in all honesty, I couldn't think of anything. I'm sure most of the feedback you get is about what's wrong, what needs to be changed, what improvements could be made. But I just wanted to share my experience.

My son is six years old, has autism and started full-day kindergarten this past September. He did KinderStart two years in a row, so he started a year late because of my feelings of how he was progressing with his therapy provided by Eastern Health.

My son has issues with social skills, toileting, wandering, running, sensory issues and dealing with frustration. He is also very caring, smart, empathetic and outgoing. When I approached his school the first year, I did so with him registered in French immersion. The administration was a little hesitant but I pushed for it and they supported my choice. He has been in school for seven months now and is flourishing. His teachers, IRTs, guidance counsellors, principal and bus drivers are all amazing.

He loves to go to school. His social skills are improving. He's dealing with his frustrations better, asking for a break rather than squealing. He is easily speaking and reading in a second language. Everyone is very in tune with his needs and while still ensuring he doesn't stand out as different within his class.

His teacher – and she says his teacher's name – is more than I could ever ask for. If every teacher was like her, I don't think you'd ever have another issue.

As I'm sure any parents is, I was so nervous in sending him to full-day kindergarten. I've never left him with babysitters other than family. I've had nothing but positive interactions with everyone involved from his school.

That's absolutely amazing in my opinion. What a beautiful story about this child with autism



who's in French immersion in full-day kindergarten. And all those positive things that are happening in that child's life because we had the same kind of courage that the Minister of Finance had –

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

**MR. KIRBY:** – when she went before the board of trade and demanded a better start in school for our children. Like I said, I'm proud to sit next to somebody who makes choices like that.

And, you know, I could go on and I'm going to bring back more stories like this because I have lots of others. It speaks to the good work our teachers are doing. Because if you listen, there's nothing good going on in schools but we know that there's so much good going on.

Myself, I've gone to so many schools. I was up in Labrador West recently.

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

**MR. KIRBY:** We went to a school; Menihék. Unbelievable things are going on there with retention of young people who would otherwise have fallen through the cracks. The principal there is finding all kinds of interesting ways to keep them in school.

I went to the intermediate school; amazing display of school spirit all facilitated by excellent teachers. We went down to the Member for Bay of Islands' District, down to J. J. Curling. That day we went into that school the children were basically participating in a public speaking exercise, little ones up speaking in front of the whole school assembly; hundreds of kids. And these kids are getting up talking about why they're dressed in this costume on spirit day.

We went to the Member for Corner Brook's high school there. A beautiful school built by the previous Administration. A beautiful school, one of the nicest I've ever visited. Went in and there was a full orchestra playing, a 29-piece orchestra, high school students – beautiful, beautiful stuff.

All these things are happening in our schools. All these beautiful, great things being done by

teachers and other school staff and we never hear those stories. We have to hear those stories.

I went to a school in the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor – Buchans' district. The principal and the assistant principal there told me that the first year they went to that school there were over 100 suspensions. And so far this year, this was just a few weeks ago, they've had three.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Hear, hear!

**MR. KIRBY:** Because they've implemented a reward system, not a punishment system, a reward system to help kids stay out of trouble. So, all these things are going on.

We have to celebrate. We have to celebrate because if we continue this negative, negative diatribe about what's going wrong in schools, those teachers are never going to get the credit they deserve for all their hard work. We have to do better to shine a light on all the great things that are going on in our schools, and there are so many of them.

We absolutely cannot continue to have misleading, misinformation, alternative facts, made up stuff thrown around as if it is factual. There are problems in schools; no doubt about it and we acknowledge it, but there are lots of good things going on.

I just want to say a few more things about the budget. I'm just wondering, I look to the Government House Leader about how much time I have.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** You take your time.

**MR. KIRBY:** There are so many good things in this budget for education, but I am so proud of what we're doing to early learning and care now.

A few years ago when I sat in Opposition, there was a report that came out. It was the most embarrassing thing I think that's ever happened to the education system here in the province. It was called Early Years Study 3 and it talked about the provision of childcare in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Child care, in my view, and I'm not an expert in this area of education, but I learned a lot about it

from people, child care is sort of like a three-legged stool. One leg on the stool is quality, another leg on the stool is spaces, availability of space, and the other leg is affordability. You got to have quality, you got to have space and you got to have affordability. This report – while the previous administration was in power they remember me talking about it because I think I did three 20-minute blocks in the budget debate, a full hour of discussion about this report. It was so embarrassing to us.

We have done so much since. Full-day kindergarten was a big part of it. We were absolutely slammed for being so far behind the rest of the country on full-day kindergarten and people – it's funny when you run into people from other provinces, I run into people and people say: What do you do? I say: I'm in the government. Oh yeah, what do you do? I'm the Minister of Education. Then they ask questions. I say, well, one thing we've done is full day kindergarten and they say: What, full-day kindergarten, you're only just doing that now?

People who have children, who are almost adults, and they were in full-day kindergarten. Some provinces have full-day kindergarten for kids who are four-years-old. We only have it for five-year-olds. That's universal in those provinces. They have child care in their schools. These places are so far ahead of us.

We were slammed nationally and publicly embarrassed, basically. It was shameful what happened, but we have done so much since. When the previous administration was in power they made some small steps towards rectifying the issue. They did promise full-day kindergarten, although then they basically denied it afterwards.

But a couple of things that I wanted to highlight that we did in this budget that goes to quality and affordability. We are actually doing fairly well on the spaces, I would say. We're doing pretty good on the spaces and I think full-day kindergarten helped a lot to relieve a lot of the pressures in the child care system, especially in the metro and other highly-urbanized areas in the province.

In this budget, we have an additional – and this is when things are hard, okay? We are staring

down the barrel of an enormous – we still have an enormous budgetary deficit, although somehow, I don't know, it was an inhumane task that we went from staring down a \$2.7 billion deficit that the previous crews just left around to be cleaned up. We are gone from that to, I think, it's \$778 million. Herculean effort it required. There was no help from the Opposition, you just heard that. A Herculean effort to get this thing, wrestle it down and get control of it.

So getting these minor, minor – because it is minor in comparison to having \$8 million worth of spending – getting these things out of the budget are absolutely amazing, as far as I'm concerned, in a time of spending reductions. More and more we have both Opposition parties calling for further reductions in spending. At a time when we have so little money, we have new initiatives for child care.

One of the things that we had in the election campaign was a commitment to improving on the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement. That goes a long way to improving the working conditions of early childhood educators and operators of child care centres.

We just had a debate here on pay equity, not long ago, and we know early childhood educators are predominantly female, and we know that they have a long ways to go to catch up in terms of salary. This goes a long way to improving working conditions for early childhood educators. It also goes a long way to improving the quality. Because everything we know about the research on the workforce, on the labour force, on working conditions that people have, we know that if you're – if you have better remuneration, then things are improved in terms of quality. It shows that in the research on early learning and care. So we have checked that box. That election commitment is complete in this budget.

On top of that, and this is not something that we talked about during the election, we have an additional \$2 million to improve the affordability of child care. That's a significant issue because we know in a lot of instances that women are unable to enter the labour force and sometimes single dads as well, because they have child-rearing responsibilities that preclude them from entering the workforce. So now there

will be more money to improve the subsidy that's provided to parents.

On top of all this, it's an extremely exciting time to be in my job because the federal government later, in a few months, stay tuned for the details, it's extremely exciting, we're going to have more federal support for early learning and care.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** What?

**MR. KIRBY:** We're going to have more federal support for early learning and care. The federal Liberal government under Justin Trudeau made child care a priority in the election campaign in 2015. They have delivered on that promise and now we are going to have more federal dollars, actually we have none right now. We're going to have federal money to support early learning and care, child care initiatives in this province, and stay tuned, before long we'll be signing the bilateral agreement with the federal government. There are all kinds of exciting things in there.

On top of the base amount that the federal government is going to be providing to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador for child care, there's a \$100 million fund for innovation in child care. There are all kinds of ideas out there.

Organizations that I won't name in our communities across the province have all kinds of excellent ideas about new initiatives. I don't think we'll have to do a whole lot of thinking on it because all the thinking has really been done by the people who have been working in the sector. So we can access a base amount and then on top of that money for innovative approaches to early learning and care.

So this is an exciting year. I am so proud, like I said, and I know the Minister of Finance is excited about it as well because it's an excellent opportunity to do the sorts of things that she stood up and told the Board of Trade we should be doing.

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

**MR. KIRBY:** I can go on further, I'd say to the Government House Leader.

I want to talk just a little about, and I'll return to this when I come back again later in the budget debate, but we hear so much about inclusive education. We hear so much about inclusive education, the challenges we have in schools – there's no denying it. That was foisted onto the education system without a lot of consultation with – everyone is affected by it. We had a motion here recently on the floor to have some sort of a summit on inclusive education. But we're summited out after the task force has done exhaustive – in fact, I heard today that there's another meeting with the task force and a stakeholder group today. So they are still doing consultations. Exhaustive discussions have gone on and we know we got to do a better job.

One thing that we did in this budget, which is great because it's what teachers, parents and schools have been asking for, we've got an extra \$500,000 for student assistant time. I hear that when I go to schools: You got to have more assistant time. The appeals process is exhausting us. We are wore out. We have more student assistant time. And not only that, last budget – if you want to talk about last year's budget – we had \$500,000 in that budget for student assistant time.

So in the space of 12 months, we've added \$1 million for additional student assistant time for kids with special education needs. Unbelievable that we've been able to do this in this time of difficulty, but we have prioritized these things, we know what we need to do. We have a plan to fix the problems that we have.

Last year, on top of that, we added an additional 27 teachers for kids with special education needs, and that's included in this budget: \$1.7 million, almost \$1.8 million in additional funding for inclusive education since a year ago – unbelievable.

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

**MR. KIRBY:** And when the task force delivers its report, we are going to have a lot more to say about this, I assure you. We will get to the bottom of this. We're going to fix it, and that's why there's an additional \$100,000 in this budget to allow the task force to complete their work.

I saw the chair the other day, and Dr. Alice Collins is something else. She's phenomenal, one of the greatest education leaders in this province today, without a doubt.

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

**MR. KIRBY:** Give her a big hand because she's done an amazing job, her and the other members of the task force, excellent, excellent people who really understand and care about the quality of education in this province.

She said to me: I saw there was \$100,000 for the task force. She said: We were really watching the pennies. We know we're supposed to do that. She said: This will help us continue to do the work that we have to do. I thought that was a great thing for her to point out that the task force members have been watching the taxpayers' dollars as well, as they do their work.

We also have \$53.8 million in school infrastructure spending – \$54 million in repairs in schools, leaky roofs, leaky windows, doors that need replacing, lifts and elevators that need maintenance. That stuff is going to get done. There is money in here for extensions to school, and for new schools.

**MS. P. PARSONS:** Coley's Point Primary.

**MR. KIRBY:** Coley's Point Primary is in here.

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

**MR. KIRBY:** We have heard so much about that. The Member for –

**MS. P. PARSONS:** Harbour Grace – Port de Grave.

**MR. KIRBY:** – Harbour Grace – Port de Grave has been constant in her advocacy for this.

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

**MR. KIRBY:** Absolutely.

I have to say, the Member for Terra Nova has been on me constantly about the Clarenville school system and the need for improvements out there. We were talking today. There is a review going on there now for configuration. If

we find out, we get to the end of the road, that we need additional resources from the repairs and maintenance budget to address whatever change, should it happen, we will let the board of trustees decide, but we will have funding for that.

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

**MR. KIRBY:** We will have funding for the Member for Bay of Islands where they are refurbishing, doing things in a way that is absolutely economizing, basically using every dollar to full advantage – they are repurposing G.C. Rowe.

**MR. JOYCE:** Former G.C. Rowe.

**MR. KIRBY:** Former G.C. Rowe – it was a junior high school. It's being refurbished as an elementary school. I was over there; did the tour of it when we were at our Cabinet meeting in Corner Brook. They said: Look, we need this, Dale. We need this for the school. We need this for September.

I said: We will make that a priority. When we get the repairs and maintenance budget out for this year, we will make sure – and they are not even employing contractors, by the way. District maintenance staff, for the most part, are coordinating that, and they have some subcontractors in there. But they are mostly doing that as efficiently as possible, and what a job they have done.

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

**MR. KIRBY:** It is beautiful to go into, and it is absolutely exciting.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** More for less.

**MR. KIRBY:** It is more for less. It's a case where we are using existing, vacant school facilities. Rather than leaving them to rot, we are repurposing that facility so that those kids can get a better education in a school that has good air quality and lots of space. We are doing that over there, and that is all in this budget.

So there is an awful lot in here. When we come back again, hopefully, I will have another hour or so to speak about this at some other stage. I

just want to reiterate that there are a lot of good things in here. I'd just say, I implore the Member for Mount Pearl South, before I sit down I just want to say, it's time –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** North.

**MR. KIRBY:** Mount Pearl North, sorry.

The time has come to knock it off, Mr. Speaker. The time has come to knock it off. Stop all of the personal attacks, stop all the name calling, stop making things up, stop pulling information out of thin air and frightening seniors and frightening public servants and frightening health care workers and frightening teachers and scarring parents, by making stuff up on the fly, not getting any corroboration.

When we were in Opposition, yes, we opposed, and I think we did a darn good job of it, but do you know what, we used the facts, and when we didn't have the facts we asked the minister. If the minister didn't have the facts, the minister got somebody else, some official expert in the department to give the correct information. Let's talk about the facts. Don't be like Donald Trump.

Please stop spinning conspiracy theories that are completely fabricated. People deserve better than that. We all have our moments, there's no question. People are fallible, we're all human, but, please, let's have an adult conversation about the problems that we have in this province.

There's no question, this budget's not perfect. No one since this province was a Dominion has been perfect. They're all imperfect, but do you know what, we can have a conversation about the facts that are in there, but when you're using social media, when you're not attacking the character of good people like the Minister of Health, when you're not doing that, smearing people like Dr. Jim Feehan or one of the best journalists ever produced in this province, David Cochrane, when you're making up stuff and just slinging it out there and see if it will stick on, that absolutely has to be called out. In *The Telegram* this week, they called out the Member for Mount Pearl North.

Again, I have a couple of minutes here. I don't have time to read it all but, basically, he said use solid information. Stop scarring people. It's already a tense situation. Stop playing politics on social media when people have legitimate concerns about their jobs. So, please, just knock it off.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, I love the rousing ovations I get when I stand up.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Virginia Waters – Pleasantville, that the House do now adjourn until the call of the Chair.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The motion is that the House do now adjourn to the call of the Chair.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

Carried.

This House now stands adjourned to the call of the Chair.

On motion, the House adjourned to the call of the Chair.