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HANSARD

*Speaker: Honourable Tom Osborne, MHA*

Wednesday

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The House met at 10 a.m.

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

Admit strangers.

**Orders of the Day**

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

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I call for the Order Paper, Motion 1, the budget.

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

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

It's certainly a pleasure of rise this morning to speak to *Budget 2017*. Over the last couple of days, we're heard from a number of Members, certainly a lot on this side, in regard to *Budget 2017*.

Before I speak to that, I just want to take a minute to recognize that last week was volunteer appreciation week, and I just want to recognize all the volunteers all across the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador on the great work they do, but certainly in the District of Ferryland, my region, from Petty Harbour-Maddox Cove, the Goulds region which is part of the City of St. John's, south to the small community of St. Shott's on the Southern Avalon, and all the great organization groups and the work they do to drive our communities, to drive our regions and to sustain our regions.

That's everything from school councils to volunteer fire departments to municipal leaders, either municipalities, local service districts, and everything in between. They do tremendous work in our communities and our regions and it's certainly a great week to recognize them for all the activities they do and the contributions they make to, as I said, our communities. Most of them don't get remuneration. They do it

because of the love of their community, the love of the province and the fact that they want to give back. I think it's extremely important.

The other side that is quite interesting we see today, seeing more of it, is young people being involved in various roles and various opportunities, various avenues in terms of giving back to their community. A lot of that certainly starts at the school level, in high school. You see youth now that are involved, as part of the curriculum, to give back volunteer hours, to get involved with their community and to get started at a very early age. I've seen it first-hand with youth from our schools who get involved with various activities. It starts that process of civic duty and giving back to your community and it's certainly good to see.

I congratulate our youth, our youth groups and those who get involved and the work they do because it is so important, starting at a young age. As we know, most people who get involved in activities like that, if you get involved at an early age, it's something that becomes a part of your life, a part that you allot time for as you go through different stages of your life. It's good to get started early and see that giving back to the community. I certainly congratulate them as well.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, we're undertaking, over the last couple of days and into the next few weeks, to talk about *Budget 2017*. Obviously that flows out of this administration's first budget, the budget of last year and some of the issues that they dealt with and how they dealt with them.

I guess the biggest one last year was looking at the balance sheet, looking at expenditures, looking at revenues. This government chose a route that wasn't very balanced and I think everybody, far and wide, since that time has assessed it, seen the results of some of those decisions and what it meant in regard to effects on the economy, effects on individuals, effects on seniors, effects on middle-class families. Then there's a trickle-down effect in terms of the overall economy and what it means for young students, I mentioned earlier, in terms of

decisions they make in regard to staying here in the province, will they go elsewhere; middle-class families, young families just starting out having children and as well those who do have kids that now may be in the school system, depending on job opportunities, things like taxation, their ability to stay here and what they can return to, the kind of life they can build with their family.

All of that rolls into decisions they make in regard to whether they stay here in the province or what they would do. That's driven and those choices are strongly connected to the choices made by any government in budgets in terms of economic or social policy and how that effects directly those people who live in the province. It's all interconnected.

I think it was yesterday, maybe the leader of the Third Party, when she spoke, she talked about economic indicators. Those, indeed, are a snapshot of what's happened in the past year and what's predicted to happen in the future year to come in regard to the opportunities. The economy, is it going to bounce back? What's the plan of the current administration and how do they plan on getting there and getting through a rough period in regard to things that have affected our fiscal situation, particularly related to oil and the dramatic reduction in oil price and the loss of revenues? That's one component of it.

That's all interconnected and it's important that people have confidence. When they look to government, they can say okay, we're dealing with a particular set of circumstances, this is the way forward, we can see it and, at the end of the day, we see a result of where we're going to arrive at or to.

I think most of the commentary we've had over the past 17 or 18 months, since last year's budget, has been that clear path or that plan hasn't been articulated. It's not understood. Somebody would even say we're not even sure if there is a plan, and that caused grave concerns for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Because overall, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are an optimistic people, certainly very innovative – over 500 years of our history here in this province, prior a country of Newfoundland, we've always been innovative and we've always

been able to adapt whatever the circumstances, and that's in our history.

And the optimism comes with that, I think, because whatever the challenge, we're always able to seize the opportunity, take advantage of whatever challenge it is and turn it into something positive for the province. So we are optimistic.

Unfortunately, with *Budget 2016*, I don't think it relayed that optimism – tied it to a plan and said based on the current circumstances, here's the way forward, there are opportunities, we need to see our way through a difficult time and here's a balanced approach to see us through.

We did see, I think, over 300 in terms of new taxes and fees which stifled many of those indicators I talked about earlier, which is the budget documents, I think *The Economy 2017*. It looks back at 2016, what transpired there in regard to indicators and what we're predicting for 2017.

That's where the optimism and the plan comes in and you have a balanced approach in terms of dealing with it, that all comes together to be able to articulate a vision for the province and see us through whether it's two years, four years or 10 years out.

I talked about optimism and opportunities that exist in our province and some of the things that we've built on in terms of our administration over the past 12 or 13 years, you have to take advantage of opportunities as they exist whether that's intellectual knowledge, technology, natural resources, innovation, the IT sector, film industry, tourism industry which has been so important to this province that we've grown significantly to almost \$1 billion – obviously we've been recognized nationally and internationally for the program we had started in regard to the development, the advertising campaign and how effective that's been. We need to continue to build on that, but that's a part of what we have and what we've developed.

So we look at some of these in regard to opportunities and how we continue that optimism – our natural resources, certainly with our fishery, some of the challenges we're dealing with today have been coming for a while

especially when you look at the transition that's – well, not started in regard to shellfish and going to a ground fishery. We need to be ready and prepared to do that.

Unfortunately, I don't think we're ready and prepared as we should be. Because when we went through a process a number of years ago and the EU wanted to get involved in a trade agreement with North America and with Canada, they saw the opportunity and so did we in regard to that huge market in the EU and the ability to trade, to import-export. If you go back and look at our history in terms of – we've been an exporting nation and an exporting province as part of Canada. It's a huge part of who we are. Certainly with our commodities and natural resources it's extremely significant.

So within that process there are many opportunities; overall procurement, IT, oil and gas, all kinds of areas. The one I'll talk about now is the fishery and what that means and what it will mean in terms of driving economic activity. There's a huge market in the EU; big consumers of fish, even traditionally going back to Spain and Portugal and the salt fish trade many, many years ago. It's still sound today in regard to salt fish, but obviously other commodities too going into that market.

Especially in the UK, look at the amount of shrimp that's gone into that market over the past decades and decades. What's coming off with the EU, the trade agreement, is that those tariffs would come off and make it obviously much more beneficial to get in. Now there's a cap. You can put so much resource in and then it's capped and you're hit with a tariff. Obviously, from a business model point of view, that causes concern once that tariff is done. So that would be removed under the new trade agreement.

One of the elements of the trade agreement that we recognized well along was in regard to the ability to promote and help the transition of the industry, which we're facing today. Back then in 2014, that's why we agreed, along with the industry, to relinquish minimum processing requirements. That was one of the provincial or sub-regional authorities that was available to the provinces in regard to national or international trade agreements. So the federal government could go ahead and make a trade agreement, but

there are still areas of provincial jurisdiction that the province still has the authority of the whole of that regulatory framework.

When the EU started with Canada and wanted to engage in a discussion on trade, the EU wanted the subnational or provincial issues resolved because they didn't want a trade agreement put in place after the fact. Where if a provincial jurisdiction still upheld the regulatory framework for trade, that there would be a trade dispute and it would have to go to some kind of trade tribunal where there'd be a challenge made, and if that challenge was lost or won, depending on what side, there would be a monetary possibly penalty and there would have to be a payout.

The EU wanted all that done. They wanted those to be resolved and all those regulatory frameworks to be done, whether it's dairy in Ontario, wines in Central Canada, whether it's whole logs exported out of British Columbia, all of that. They wanted all of those dealt with.

In the process of being part of that discussion and the bilateral discussion between the provinces and Canada, we talked, and I talked about the fishery. We talked about how we could take advantage of that. Certainly we have unprecedented access, over a three-year period once the agreement is signed, to get into those markets and to allow that unfettered access for all fish species for Newfoundland and Labrador.

That's the other component. Traditionally we talked about a couple of species, maybe groundfish, shrimp, crab, but there's a whole range of other species that we need to look at. I know there's some work going on at the Marine Institute and others to expand that, but in the overall fish supply of the world and protein from fish, we're very small, maybe a couple of percent of what goes into the world market. There are more opportunities for us. We need to explore that, and that's the optimism and opportunity we have with the fishery.

In negotiating Canada with the EU, in regard to the overall trade agreement and the bilateral discussions we had with Canada in terms of – before they went and had overall discussions on the international trade agreement, we recognized that what was being said in science, what was

being said by those involved with the industry, some of the quota cuts and what was going on with shrimp and crab, we recognized there was a downturn coming in the shellfish industry.

Because of that, and after meeting with industry, we said if we relinquish the MPRs we would engage in a process of five pillars with a \$400 million fund that would help that transition; that would start that process. That should be started today. We should be well into it with that fund and started that process of the transition, and we recognized it.

In the five pillars, there were things like research and development, innovation, a marketing component looking at if there was any loss in some of that discussion in regard to MPRs. So all of that would be considered, but the thing was to transition in and make sure we could take full advantage of the market, the new market, but also recognize that if we have to transition into other species, there's technology, innovation, research. All those things need to be done. I talked about other species. That would be one part of it, and what else you could put in to those new markets and elsewhere around the world. All of that is part and parcel of that transition and being ahead of the curve.

What we have now, we're in the middle of all of this, the current administration – we were criticized for not having a commitment from the federal government. In actual fact, the federal government bilaterally control the rules. To the best of my knowledge, there was no agreement signed with any province, but we did have, and we ensured we had, 200 to 300 pages of documents that clearly indicated the discussions over a period of time with the federal government, what the end result was. We laid all that out for people to see. Here's the documentation. Here's what was agreed to. It was quite clear what it was. It was a \$400 million fund, five pillars to look at exactly today what's happening and the transition to have support to allow it to do that.

What we have, which is not that fund, we've got apparently a \$100 million fund. We don't know what the ratios are. I think in Estimates a while back, my colleagues tell me, the current minister responsible said it could be 70-30; it could be 60-40. We're not really sure. The fund hasn't

started to flow. There's no indication of the administration of that fund, what programs it would be or anything of that nature. So we're not where we need it to be.

The other point was the current prime minister, when he was leader prior to the last election, the prior premier of the province wrote, asked him to clearly indicate where he stood in regard to the \$400 million fund. He clearly articulated in a letter back to the current Premier of the day that he would support it and Newfoundland and Labrador should receive what they were promised; but, as we've come to learn, in actual fact what happened, we didn't get it. We got rumours of \$100 million, and how we leveraged that we don't know. It's not active today or nothing has been done with it.

In the budget, I think there's somewhere in the range of \$10 million to help leverage that. So it's a far cry from the \$280 million commitment that the federal government had made, that the province would use their \$120 million to leverage that and to move forward.

Now, we also heard two explanations. Well, we're getting money for small crafts and harbours. We're getting money for search and rescue. Well, that's a different envelope of money. As Canadians and part of this federation, and being a coastal province on the East Coast of Canada, we get our fair share of every envelope of money. We get that anyway. Don't tell us be happy, you're getting some money from the fund that other coastal province and other communities get. We get it anyway. We should get it and it should be improved. We should continue to get it.

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

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** Don't say to us, well, you're getting enough, be happy with that.

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are never happy just to get a share. They want to get their rightful share just like the rest of Canadians. This fund was agreed to. The current administration both here and in Ottawa has failed in terms of delivering on what they said they would deliver on. Today, with the transition going on in the fishery, we're no further ahead and we don't have any help for that.

The budget was certainly disappointing in that regard, in looking at the amount of money that was put there to leverage, a far lesser amount of \$100 million. Hopefully as we go through the budget we'll get some more insight on where that's to and how we continue to see what the details are, even though it's much less than what was originally planned for.

The other issue, I'll quickly mention is, I'm very disappointed again in this year's budget that an educational infrastructure in my district that was approved in 2015 was cancelled last year, and this year again there's no reference to it, and that's the new middle school for the Witless Bay Mobile school system. In 2015, based on concrete evidence, based on good analysis, based on a consultant's report, it was very clear that the best option was a middle school for the region. Last year it was cancelled. This year again there's no reference to it.

There's some plan. They came up with nine classrooms to build on the high school in Mobile. To date, there's another consultant hired, spending money on it, and they can't figure out whether they can even put it on the footprint or not. The word I'm hearing is they can't. We have no idea where this came from.

We met with the Minister of Education. He questioned, I think even to the families, why people would want to continue to move to the region, which was somewhat insulting to the parents and to the community. We know there has been significant growth over the past 10 years. Again, we've asked questions. We've been to the English School District asking them to vote down the reconfiguration because they never voted on the new nine classroom extension but have voted on the new school, and those are issues that are still important under the budget.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

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

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

It's a pleasure for me to rise this morning and to have my say on the budgetary process that we're going through. I guess it's time we cut through the rhetoric and the mantra that's out there that this budget is bad; it's the same as the last one. We have no plan. We don't know what we're doing. We're not accountable and all this good stuff.

Well, I guess if anybody is following the news this morning they would have seen that an institute by the name of C.D. Howe released a report on Newfoundland and Labrador that gives us all kinds of kudos for being accountable and having numbers that we can trust, and basically saying that we as a government and the Finance Minister, the Premier and the Cabinet have done a great job in getting us out of this financial mess that we found ourselves in back in 2015.

The report, Mr. Speaker, is evident of that. Allow me the time to go to a few brief highlights of what the report says. The title in itself speaks volumes. It says the summary of the C.D. Howe report of "Numbers You can Trust?"

**AN HON. MEMBER:** What?

**MR. LETTO:** Numbers You can Trust – that's a big word – and, "The Fiscal Accountability of Canada's Senior Governments, 2017."

I'm not going to go through all the provinces obviously, but I am going to highlight Newfoundland and Labrador and try to paint a picture that the sky is not falling, the chickens aren't gone to roost and that we are doing things right. We are being fiscally responsible and trying to deal with the mess that was left to us by the previous administration. It's not all doom and gloom like the Third Party would lead you to believe.

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

**MR. LETTO:** This report, Mr. Speaker, is concerned with the relevance, the accessibility, timeliness and reliability of government financial reports. The report analyzes three principal financial documents: the budget it presents at the beginning of the fiscal year, the Estimates legislators vote to approve specific program spending – and we've all been through the Estimates. We know how the information

comes out in Estimates that really, really tells a story that we are being fiscally responsible, and we are putting forward a new philosophy that some people are finding very difficult to understand, and that's the zero-based budgeting. It's very difficult for some people to grasp that and that it's actually a good way of being financially accountable – and the audited financial statements in the public accounts that report the year-end results.

The approach of this report is to locate the spending and revenue totals displayed prominently in budgets and in Public Accounts and ask several questions about them. So this is what's being done. These questions are mainly focused on the revenue, spending and balance figures of the budget, whether the Public Accounts present a comprehensive set of revenue spending and balance figures and the overall quality of financial reporting.

So, Mr. Speaker, C.D. Howe, they've been around for eons. You've heard of the C.D. Howe Institute. They are a renowned institute in Canada that are well respected for what they do. So let's bring it closer to home.

Improvements, that's the first thing that comes out in this report is improvements in the Newfoundland and Labrador accountability. We're heard from the other side how we're not being accountable. We're not being transparent. We're putting out numbers that don't make sense. We're trying to hoodwink people; all that good stuff, all that mantra.

This is the message that the Opposition is trying to put out there. I note that some people on the other side have acknowledged that there are some good things in this budget. They won't go as far as to say it's a good budget. Basically, the mantra is that it's a continuation of 2016, the 2016 budget. It is institutes like this that really, really shows that that's not what this is all about at all.

Let's go back for a few years. We'll go back to, probably, '08, '09. We all know who was in power at that time. In the 2012 fiscal accountability report, Newfoundland and Labrador was ranked among the provinces that do not, do not, present straightforward or

comparable figures in their budgets or Public Accounts.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** When was that?

**MR. LETTO:** In 2012.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** 2012. Who was in power then?

**MR. LETTO:** I think I know, but I'm not sure.

The lack of fiscal accountability was constant. The lack of fiscal accountability was constant in Newfoundland and Labrador from 2011-12 to 2015-16 where Newfoundland and Labrador was consistently the lowest ranking among the provinces in Canada.

Now, can we wonder why we were left with such a mess when they weren't even accountable to their own figures, to their own budgets? To compare that, in 2016-17 Newfoundland and Labrador notably improved the consistency of its headline budget and Public Accounts figures. In fact, in 2016-17, Newfoundland and Labrador received an accountability grade of B, marking a significant improvement from the failing grade of – let's see – of E – E as in elephant – in 2015-2016.

Mr. Speaker, we've been saying it since we took office in December of 2015 that we were left with a mess. It's no wonder when you talk about the lack of fiscal responsibility – the Opposition was trying to put forward a deficit of \$1.1 billion and we took office, the first thing that we saw was a \$2.2 billion deficit. If we had done nothing in 2016-17, it would have been a deficit of \$2.7 billion.

So you wonder why that happens. You've got the institutes like C. D. Howe confirming what we been saying since we got elected, that we were left with a mess and this province was on the brink of bankruptcy. If nothing had been done it would have been – I don't know what's the word to use –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Devastating.

**MR. LETTO:** That's one word.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Crisis.

**MR. LETTO:** It would have been a crisis. There are several words that we could use.

Mr. Speaker, they go back a few more years, and I want to highlight a few more because it's not only 2015-2016 that they failed miserably, not only then. In previous reports, inconsistent figures in its budget and Public Accounts resulted in a failing and consistently low accountability grades. You wonder why our Finance Minister stands on her feet in this House and argues every day, day after day, that the job that she was faced in December, 2015 was daunting.

Now, C. D. Howe, the report has found that those same numbers to be consistent and resulting in higher financial accountability in the province. This is not just some ordinary group out there saying it is. This is C. D. Howe Institute we're talking about, one of the most renown, prestigious financial institutions in this country, Mr. Speaker.

The one area in which the report marks potential improvement is with consistency, consistency in the preparation of Estimates. So, Mr. Speaker, we are doing things right. They go on to say the difference in budgeted and actual expenditures, which is, of course, always an issue – you budget and what do you actually spend; do you spend more than you budget; do you spend less than you budget; and how accurate are these figures that you budget or are they just factious numbers.

The report gives a historical examination of the percent of announced spending change and actual spending change. The result calculates percent changes in revenue and in spending from two key documents; one from the headline figures presented in budgets and the other from the figures in Public Accounts.

Now, they didn't have a lot of figures in Public Accounts, because they did none. At least now Public Accounts is something that we're doing consistently. The figures present annual budget target misses. For this measure, a smaller number is better – the smaller the number, the better it is, and reflects more accurate financial forecasts.

The difference in expenditures for Newfoundland and Labrador is documented for the last one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight years. It goes back to – for instance, in 2010-2011 there was a 10.9 per cent difference. In 2011-2012, 8.6 per cent difference; 3.8 in 2012-2013; and up to 2016, it was 0.9 per cent. So, Mr. Speaker, we're actually making budgets that we stand by, they're realistic, and they represent the economy of the day.

In this time period, Mr. Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador again consistently ranked among the least accurate provinces in Canada. Again, we wonder why we're left with such a mess that we were left with. Mr. Speaker, it's also not surprising that provinces who are more dependent on natural resource revenue, thanks to buoyant prices over the oil and whatnot, would have more changes.

Mr. Speaker, we go back to 2011-2012 again with the grades, and I don't want to stand up here like a school teacher or a professor or anything like that. These letters – because it's not numbers; it's graded in letters – are indicative of what the past administration, the lack of accountability, the lack of fiscal responsibility that the previous administration exemplified over the past number of years. I gave a brief outline of the factors that are being considered for these grades.

In 2011-2012, the administration that was in place at that time was given a grade of F. Now, when I was going to school F did not mean fantastic. It did not mean fantastic, it meant fail. If you got an F, boy, I tell you, you were in trouble. You failed. So, Mr. Speaker, in 2011-2012, the PC administration failed in their accountability and the responsibility regarding their fiscal responsibilities.

In 2012-2013 they got up, they made drastic improvements. They got up to a D, a D<sup>+</sup> to be exact. It was that bad in 2013-2014 that we have an n/a which is not applicable. So I guess they didn't grade at all.

In 2014-2015, which was not so very long ago, when they had it – and these were the times, by the way, when they had the \$25 billion, they had all the money to spend. They brought it home from Ottawa – b'ys, we got it.



Well, we got it all right. We know where we got it. We got it and they blew it because –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Look at the roads.

**MR. LETTO:** Yes, just look at the roads is right.

In 2015-2016, as I mentioned earlier, they fell off the cliff again because that was the year that they saw the last year of their mandate when they spent like drunken sailors with no accountability and just trying to buy votes. That's all they were doing. There was no accountability and they came up with a big, fat E.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** What?

**MR. LETTO:** E, which does not mean enough.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Not exceptional.

**MR. LETTO:** It's not exceptional.

In 2016-2017, Mr. Speaker, the year that we took government and the year we had to make all the tough decisions – and yes, they were tough decisions. They weren't very popular decisions, they were tough ones but we had to do it.

This report, the C. D. Howe report, proves how irresponsible and fiscally irresponsible they were during their time in office, Mr. Speaker, a time when they had \$25 billion in oil revenue to put around this province and they squandered it.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** How much?

**MR. LETTO:** \$25 billion, and here we are trying to get by on the measly dollars we got left in our coffers and we get a rating of B in the first year. In the first year we took office, when this government, this Cabinet, this Premier, this Finance Minister had the tough decisions to make to save our province from bankruptcy, we came up with a B.

Mr. Speaker, the mantra from the other side is exactly what it is. It's rhetoric; it's mantra. It's not indicative of what we're trying to do here as a government. Yes, we had to make some tough

decisions, and we'll discuss that today in the PMR, I'm sure, with all the fees and everything.

There were tough decisions, and people were hit hard. We did not feel good about doing that. We took no joy in doing that, but when you see what happened over the past number of years, Mr. Speaker, we had no choice. We had no choice.

When you go back and talk about the Estimates, one of the things – I attended the Estimates last night for Municipal Affairs and Environment. If you remember back to the debate on last year's budget and the \$30 million contingency fund that we put in that we were, I guess we were chastised for, and people decided to call it a slush fund – a slush fund. Remember the slush fund?

Well, the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi and Cape St. Francis asked questions on that. They were asking questions around why there was such a difference in emergency spending and funding, why we had to spend so much that wasn't budgeted for. If you recall back in October, Thanksgiving weekend, we had quite the storm. There was a lot of damage done around this province. Guess where the money came from to accommodate municipalities, private individuals for loss of property and damage. It came from that contingency fund, Mr. Speaker.

It shows that we were prudent, that we were thinking ahead. These things, we don't know when and if they're going to happen but they are happening more frequently and it's something that we have to do. So the slush fund that the Third Party was especially rampart about, and even the Opposition as well, that we could take that out of the budget. Well, Mr. Speaker, it's a good thing we left it in there because many people are seeing the benefit from that today.

Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of good things in the 2017-2018 budget, and we will be true to the budget. We will do what we said we were going to do. We have a plan. We hear that all the time, that we have no plan. The plan, Mr. Speaker, is called *The Way Forward*, and *The Way Forward* is a plan that shows we are responsible and we are going to get this province back on track. We have a Finance Minister, a Premier and a

Cabinet that is working very, very hard to make sure that we get there.

Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure for me to get up here this morning and to put a new light on this of where we are, and that people and organizations, like the C.D. Howe Institute, recognize us for what we are doing, and that what we are doing is right. We will see the benefits in years to come and we are on the right track.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Is the House ready for the question on the sub-amendment?

All those in favour of the motion?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**MR. SPEAKER:** All those against the motion?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Nay.

**MR. SPEAKER:** I declare the motion defeated.

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

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

Call in the Members.

### Division

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

All those in favour of the motion, please rise.

**CLERK (Barnes):** Mr. Paul Davis, Mr. Hutchings, Mr. Kent, Mr. Brazil, Ms. Perry, Mr. Petten, Ms. Michael, Mr. Lane.

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

**CLERK:** Mr. Andrew Parsons, Mr. Byrne, Mr. Haggie, Mr. Hawkins, Ms. Cathy Bennett, Mr. Kirby, Mr. Trimper, Ms. Dempster, Mr. Edmunds, Mr. Mitchelmore, Mr. Letto, Ms. Haley, Mr. Holloway, Mr. Warr, Ms. Pam Parsons, Mr. Bragg, Mr. Reid, Mr. Dean, Mr. King.

Mr. Speaker, the ayes, 8, the nays, 19.

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

I declare the motion defeated.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, we'll continue speaking to the budget.

I believe there's a non-confidence motion which I'm sure the Opposition would like to speak to.

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

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

Yeah, we'd like to speak to that, of course. Any opportunity we can get to get up in this House and speak about issues that are important to the people of the province, and this budget obviously is a big issue that's of importance, no doubt.

When I spoke on the sub-amendment, Mr. Speaker, I made reference to – and I just listened to the Member for Labrador West speak about how great the budget is and all that. That's fair game, and if he feels that way, that's his own prerogative. I don't know if everyone on this side really agrees with what he said, or the people in the province.

This budget that was just brought down, it's a continuation of last year's budget. There's been no change. We've had an adjustment, and like I said yesterday, the gas tax was adjusted and a few small little tweaks, but we're still faced with those taxes and fees. There are still 300 – one was reduced, but we're still faced with 300 taxes and fees that were brought in last year. I think it's safe to say it's crippling the economy. We see it every day. We see it, we talk to people in our communities, we talk to people we know. Our economy is struggling.

You can look at certain economic indicators and whatnot and they're all pointing in the wrong direction. The budget documents themselves actually stated that. We're not in a great place in our economy where we stand today. A lot of that is a direct result of this budget.

Another interesting point, as the Member opposite was saying just now, speaking the virtues of the budget and all the good things. I was at a loss to where he's been living for the last 12 months, the last 18 months because two weeks after the swearing-in ceremony or less than two weeks after, the Premier and Minister of Finance sat in the media centre and they threw a black cloud over the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador that's never been thrown over it before.

There was a lot of hope and optimism and the people had a bounce in their step. That day when they got up and they told us everything, they did actually tell us the sky was falling. Contrary to what the Member for Lab West is getting up and saying now that we're the ones, we're not the ones. We're trying to tell them that the sky wasn't falling. We've never believed the sky was falling.

This is a rough patch in the road. Everyone knew that. We knew that. The former administration told everyone we were heading for a few rough years with oil production and oil prices. We knew it, they just dipped lower than anyone, any of the experts around had figured, but everyone knew this was coming. This was not a surprise. I've talked to a lot of people and they say the same thing. It was that one given day that was a black cloud and it's not been lifted.

To say anyone else is responsible for bringing gloom and doom to the province, that's not accurate, Mr. Speaker. This government opposite are the ones to put the gloom and doom over the province, and right now today, 18 months later, it's still there and it's on them. It's totally on them. They're responsible.

To be pointing fingers this way to be the cause of that, if anything, we tried to be the voice of those people that have concerns. We experienced that last year in the filibuster. We read emails. We were criticized somewhat but a lot of people were very thankful because their voices were finally heard. Their voices finally got to the floor of this House of Assembly. Their views, their thoughts, their concerns, we brought them to the floor of the House of Assembly like never before. We read their personal messages.

Unless Members opposite had the volume turned off or earplugs in –

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

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

**MR. PETTEN:** – they would have heard it loud and clear what the people of this province thought of that budget and their views have not changed.

Mr. Speaker, it's become pretty evident to me that you're getting less uprisings now because a lot of people on the street now, they throw their hands up. What's new? What's new? Here we are again. There's nothing that surprises me with this government. The same show, it's a different day, it's a different date on the calendar, a different time on the clock, but the same issues happening.

I spoke to people and someone the other day said to me –

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

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

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

They say the amount of issues, the amount of material that's being generated, the mistakes, and the missed steps being generated by this government is too hard to keep up with. It's a very accurate statement because I say that every day. It's unbelievable. We have 25 minutes in Question Period; we could be going for days on the issues. You don't seem to pay justice to the proper issues because there are just so many of them. There are so many missed steps. There are so many mistakes. There are so many questions that no one can put an answer to. The government opposite, when they come back and give us their responses, you're left shaking your head.

Mr. Speaker, there's one issue – there are a few, of course – I'd like to just revisit. It was a decision that was made a few weeks back. All the while adult dental care is cut, funding to youth organizations is cut – the Girl Guides groups, the Boy Scout groups, the Boys and Girls clubs, their funding is cut because we're in

a tough, fiscal financial situation. We have to make drastic measures, we don't have the money, and we're counting every penny. Okay, that's fair.

We cut snow clearing last year. That was a public uproar that we all witnessed last winter. That was a savings of \$1.9 million – we know it's a lot less than that, but that's what they articulated. Plus, we still have 300 new fees and taxes. Nothing has changed, it's still there, just year two of them.

So you get the picture and the gloom and doom is painted over the province and everyone is saying when are we ever going to get out of this. Everyone looking at the price of oil wondering when is the light at the end of the tunnel. Then, all of a sudden, the MHA for Corner Brook, the Minister of AES gets up at the Corner Brook Broad of Trade and announces free skiing in Corner Brook; Marble Mountain free-for-all.

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

**MR. PETTEN:** I do hope that the lady who protested in front of this building for dental care – I don't know if she is but I'd like her to be watching this now and listening to that, Mr. Speaker. She doesn't feel too good. She's home eating pureed food because she can't afford to get her dental work done, and the Minister of AES is over here patting his chest and beating his chest when he went and made an announcement in Corner Brook that none of the rest of his government knew. They had to pick up the pieces.

The minister went and announced free skiing. Now, all of a sudden – but I'll back up a second on that, Mr. Speaker, because that's one Question Period can't give me an opportunity to –

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

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

**MR. PETTEN:** Question Period doesn't give me the opportunity to really articulate what I thought of that.

I did spend years in tourism with the former minister. I know the department. I knew the way

Marble Mountain worked. I know the struggles, the challenges Marble Mountain faced.

The Minister of Tourism, the current minister today responsible for Marble Mountain, when they shut down the mountain, he supported the board. I support the board, their decisions. No problem, I'm with you; I agree. We're losing money. It's doesn't make sense to keep it open. I support you.

Days later when the minister goes, the MHA for Corner Brook, the Minister of AES, and gets on his high horse and looking after – the champion for Corner Brook, announces the free-for-all, then the minister responsible for the department is scrambling. All of a sudden, he fires the board – fires them. They're gone. No, their decision was horrendous. We need new people there. Totally against their decision, no, no we're going to give free skiing to Corner Brook.

Nobody knew it was happening only the Minister of AES on his high horse out there, and then everyone is left to pick up the pieces. That happens when you have people who do reckless things.

So to get back to it; \$11,000 a day, that was articulated by the MHA for Terra Nova when he got up and answered questions because the minister was unavailable. He answers and he tells us: No, it's not \$5,000 a day; it's \$11,000 – new revelation, so now we have an \$11,000 loss a day.

Then all the while, guess what ski resort is in his own district? What ski resort is in that Member's district? White Hills. White Hills is actually out in his own district. No free-for-all out at White Hills; you pay for your ski rentals and you pay for your passes, but the Member for Terra Nova is out beating – oh, no he supports this decision of Marble Mountain. No, forget my own district, White Hills.

I'll guarantee you, Mr. Speaker, if I had a ski resort in my own district and one of the my colleagues was given a free-for-all for the ski resort in his district, do you think I would stand in this House and speak the virtues of that decision? No way, never, ever, but he did that.

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

**MR. PETTEN:** He got to go back, Mr. Speaker, there such thing as elections, when people go and actually mark their X. So he has to go back and face his own people, the same people that use White Hills. The same people who saw that their own ski resort was snubbed because the powerful ministers on the West Coast wanted to open it up for the Easter weekend.

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

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

**MR. PETTEN:** I do hope that those people – actually, I hope a few Girl Guide leaders and children are watching this today and seeing their funding cut; I hope they're seeing the mockery that's happening across the way today, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I'm having a job hearing the hon. Member who's been recognized to speak. I'd ask for co-operation from all Members in the House.

Thank you.

I recognize the hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

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

I guess the truth does hurt, and I understand that. I would not want to be sitting over there listening to me giving them – say what I'm saying about them because it does hurt. A bit of an ego goes on, I understand that. That's fine.

I'll just refresh, and I'm not going back there. I will not go back there but I have to say, I don't know if the Member was there in last year's sitting when I said he was auditioning for the Trinity Pageant. He's still the top candidate but I'm not sure if they're ready for him yet or not, but he don't have to – he can rest assured, he's by a mile top of the heap over there. I'm not going back there but I just wanted to remind him, he's the guy. He's next in line if any openings come up. He's doing a great job of that every day, Mr. Speaker. You just got to sit there. Just listen to it; it's theatrics at its best. As long

as there are theatrics in here, he wrote the book on it.

I want to go back and finish off on the Marble Mountain point; \$33,000 for a three-day ski weekend. They're all out there. Now, I've been around the workings of government, I'm not so sure even the minister can get into the cashbox of any Crown corporation, but the Member for Corner Brook was out there telling us the amount of money they made and how much it cost. They had a very successful weekend. He was actually like, I thought I was talking to – you wouldn't know but you were talking to the banker.

I'm listening to it and thinking, does he have any – what's he out on the cash? He's out giving out ski passes to people. Is that what he's doing? He must be out working in the kitchen too. I don't know what he was at. The Premier apparently was out shaking hands on the hill too. See, where I come from, Mr. Speaker, I call that a bit of damage control because it was a terrible decision. It was one that they had to wear, and it's one – it is what it is.

Speaking of Corner Brook – and I'm not picking on Corner Brook but it might seem that way. Corner Brook decisions – and I've been to Corner Brook many times. The Member for Terra Nova needs to start going to White Hills more often, Mr. Speaker.

Crown Lands moved to Corner Brook. No one is opposed to having a government office in Corner Brook or anywhere else in this province, Mr. Speaker, but –

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

**MR. PETTEN:** See, Mr. Speaker, they sit down, they listen to us and they catcall. A scattered one of them might get up when they're told to get up, other than that they just sit there and listen because they just don't want to – a scattered one will get up and spread the virtues of this wonderful budget.

There are 500,000 of us living here and I think outside the 30 across the way, I don't really know – there are a few others I suppose, give them probably a couple thousand would you say, that might probably agree with this but I haven't

found them. I live in a community of 26,000 people, I didn't find anybody that's over praising up any decisions they make and I'm totally sincere when I say that. If I did, I'd tell you I found a scattered one. I didn't find anybody. Now there still may be supporters of them, but they're not too proud of the decisions. I don't know, they can go out and beat their chest.

One final point, you hear the cheers and the heckling and the laughing. They take great humour in it, but that \$33,000 that was so freely given for Marble Mountain, that's a pittance to an \$8 billion budget. It is not pittance to the groups that had their funding cut. That's the point that's being made here. That lady who's looking for that dental work, those Girl Guide groups, those people are looking at that and they're saying, what? Do you mean to say we're a province that's faced with a fiscal crisis and that's what we're doing with extra money? I know it's a small amount but it's the principle of the matter, Mr. Speaker, and it's not defensible.

On the Crown Lands moving to Corner Brook, so we're in May now, we found out that the move is happening July 1 but we don't know – the workers still do not know who is moving. The move is happening July 1 was all they're told. We don't even know if the move is going to happen July 1. I don't know if they can do it that quick.

Again, I'll go back, those people have families, they have homes. Their husband or wife is working in St. John's. They have to uproot everything and move to Corner Brook, if they have to move. There's not enough compassion or sincerity shown by the government opposite to give those people a heads up, you will be moving.

It's going to take time to clue up if they have to move, to sell their home, to relocate their children, get them in schools, their wife or their husband to get another job or take leave. It's a family situation. You're not moving from St. John's to CBS or Torbay, you're moving to Corner Brook. It's like moving to another province when you look at this, it's a seven-hour drive. That's the reality.

It comes back – a lot of times when I say this, Mr. Speaker, I say this honestly and in all sincerity. We get in this House and we debate back and forth and we have our banter and whatnot, but I'm a believer in people, issues that affect people. We can talk high-level stuff all day, and a lot of people don't understand some of the things we talk about. I like to keep it to people, things that affect people.

I'm talking of snow clearing, I'm talking about the dental care, I'm talking about Girl Guides. I believe in that. That's not words out of my mouth, that's right from here. I do believe that's who I am, and I'm not changing who I am. That's why when I go up to my district I can talk all level stuff if people want to talk that, no problem, but I do like talking to the average person on the street and what really affects them. It's the people issues, and that's where this government has lost their way.

When you get the heckling and laughing, when I say about a move or the cost, or people's lives being moved from the Crown Lands office, it's insulting to people. I find it insulting that they'd find it humorous, but how do the people feel? What's the humour? What game is being played here?

Forty of us are brought in this House of Assembly to represent the people of this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Every district in this province is covered. We're here to represent the people, but somewhere along the way, Mr. Speaker, that's the biggest point that's lost in all of this, the people.

People do matter. We were told that. That sounds familiar to me. People matter. You can't lead if you can't listen. A stronger tomorrow, we heard all of that. A lot of people believed it. Based on the results of 2015, a lot of people believed it. I don't think they believe it today, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. PETTEN:** I really don't think they believe it today, because a lot of people are lost to what happened. What about the stronger tomorrow? What about people matter? People make plays, makes pun on those words because it's insulting. They are insulted by those words now.

As a member running for the PCs back in 2015, I saw the slogans. I knew people were buying the message. I didn't know if they were going to deliver or not. I worked like a dog to get elected in my own individual riding. I'm not saying I believed what they were saying or not, but coming back to the people issue, Mr. Speaker, I'm one of those people who live in this province. We all knew there was a very good chance the Liberals were going to form government. A part of me was hopeful that those words were going to mean something.

I have two daughters, 21 and 17, that I'm hoping are going to create a life and stay here. Me and my wife, the four of us live here. I have a family. I'm a person in this province, and to be totally sincere with Members opposite, we can do all the mocking we want, I was hopeful they would do a better job. Forget about your stripe, as a person who lives in this province, we all should feel that way regardless who is in government, regardless.

We have a government in Ottawa, Justin Trudeau, a Liberal government. I wish them well, because if they do well, we do well. It's just the nature of the beast. We can have our political differences. We have different ideologies. We do things differently than the government opposite. That's what politics is about, but at the end of the day, all the decisions you make, every decision this government opposite makes affects me and it affects everyone in this House, all our families, everyone in this province. That's the moral of this debate and this back and forth we get into all the time. That's where it comes down to.

So when they're making these decisions of the Marble Mountain and the Corner Brook moves – and then on top of it, I won't go down, because I talked at length about it yesterday, but the Bernard Coffey issue. There are a lot of smart people in this province, a lot smarter people probably than sitting in this House of Assembly, and even people that don't really understand the fiasco. They're saying what in the name of God, what's happened, what's gone wrong here.

Again, it comes back to the point of do you think people don't see through this? Again, it's back to the people. It's almost insulting their own intelligence to be doing stuff like that and then

defending it to the province and everyone are left scratching their heads. It seems like every decision that's made; the outcome is left as everyone is in just total confusion.

I thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. KING:** Mr. Speaker, it never ceases to amaze me the foolishness you got to listen to on a Wednesday morning. He talked about the lead role in the Trinity Pageant. Well, I think he's got the lead role in the Trinity Pageant, *Come From Away* and *Maudie* with that performance over there just then.

He talked about the poor old woman in his district that's got to eat her meals through a straw. Now that says more about his ability as an MHA than anything else to have our government do it. I challenge him, if he can't get the job done in getting that woman some dentures pass her name along to myself and my CA, Wanda Tremblett. We've had pretty good success in getting people their dentures.

He talked about us laughing and finding it funny. Well, on this side we certainly don't see anything funny about facing a \$2.7 billion deficit last year. We got that down to approximately \$1 billion last year. We don't find it funny that we had \$25 billion wasted over a 10-year period.

Do you find that funny, Mr. Speaker? Because I certainly don't; I don't find it funny when we've got 118 political patronage appointments put forward by the PC government in the fall of 2015 prior – when they knew they were going to lose the election, 118 political appointments. You had 13 in Labour Relations; six in Municipal Affairs; 40 in Health and Community Services in one day, one day. That was on October 29, 2015.

What else do we have? We have Advanced Education and Skills, we had another 19; BTCRD was 4; Environment and Conservation, 8. Fisheries and Aquaculture, we had another 14 there.

So when they talk about political appointments and patronage, they loved it. They couldn't get enough of it. They couldn't wait to get their buddies a position on a board or some paid position. That's not funny, Mr. Speaker. I don't know if you find it funny because I certainly don't, and I'm sure our colleagues on this side don't find it funny either.

This is my first opportunity to speak on the 2017 budget, which I think is a great document, a lot of good things for the District of Bonavista. I was taking some notes while the Minister of Finance was reading the speech and six things jumped out to me, but I'm just going to talk a little bit first about the multi-year infrastructure plan that was announced back on March 17, which was applauded by the construction association of Newfoundland and Labrador. It's \$3 billion over five years, which is going to be the equivalent of 4,900 jobs each year. Mr. Speaker, do you think that's good for the province, 4,900 jobs based on our infrastructure plan every year? I think that's great. The District of Bonavista is going to see some of those jobs as well, Mr. Speaker.

What we also have in that infrastructure plan is our five-year roads plan. Now, these guys never had a plan for anything, a lot of pork-barrel pavement. We saw it rolled out in the fall of 2015, but we they couldn't get it done because they rolled it out in October and we had to come back and say it's not fair to not honour their promises.

So we actually honoured their promises. We didn't have to but we did, because it wasn't fair for them to make a promise and not have it delivered to the people. We honoured that last year, Mr. Speaker, and we saw some good work in the District of Bonavista; however, some of the worse roads in my district – for example, Trinity Bight and Smith Sound going up to Harcourt-Monroe-Waterville, up to Burgoyne's Cove.

They had a senior Cabinet minister for 15 years, Mr. Speaker, and the way they were throwing around pavement when they were in power, it was all pork-barrel pavement. That senior Cabinet minister, the former Minister of Finance, couldn't scrounge up a bit of pavement

for Trinity Bight or Smith Sound. I can't believe it.

Down in Ferryland they put new pavement over good pavement, but that former minister of Trinity North couldn't look after the good people in the Trinity Bight or the good people of Smith Sound. Now, we have a tourism industry, especially in the Trinity Bight, where you have tour bus operators threatening to pull out of the area. We have 14 fishing enterprises in Bonaventure where trucks are hesitant to go up over the roads. That is neglect.

I'm thankful that the Minister of Transportation and Works took a meeting with me to discuss those concerns because it's important to me, it's important to him. That's the type of communication that we have. We have to work through those issues.

This year alone, we have \$77.2 million allocated for road infrastructure. So what you're going to see in the District of Bonavista – now it is carry-over work from last year – is Route 230A which stretches from George's Brook to the Bonavista highway.

Before, you had the former Member, a senior minister in their Cabinet, fight with the former Member for Bonavista South about who owned the road. Me, and the current Member for Terra Nova sat down and I said: MHA, do you agree that this road should be paved? He said yes because it benefits his district. They couldn't get that done, Mr. Speaker. That shows co-operation between myself and the Member for Terra Nova.

Another thing that couldn't get done over the years, you couldn't get a bit of brush cut up in the Bunyan's Cove to Port Blandford area. That was another senior Cabinet minister; the former Member for Terra Nova couldn't get that done. He was too busy taking the fire truck from the good people of Bunyan's Cove and moving it to Eastport to try to save his skin in the 2015 election.

That didn't work out too well because we got the current Member for Terra Nova, and I'm glad we got him – couldn't get a bit of brush cut. Last year, we got the brush cut going from Musgravetown to Port Blandford.



**AN HON. MEMBER:** We did a good job, didn't we?

**MR. KING:** That was us.

The road between Musgravetown and Bunyan's Cove is in terrible shape. What's going to be done next year? We're going to resurface that road so that the people in that area have a decent road to drive on. That's a high-traffic road that goes to Port Blandford which people in that area take to get to Clarendville.

What is also neglected is Point Road in Canning's Cove. This Member was in for how many years? Six years? And four of those in a Cabinet post I believe. The way their Cabinet ministers were throwing around pavement, he couldn't get those roads done. He couldn't get the road in Canning's Cove. So another conversation I'm going to have with the minister is to see can we get a bit of slippage to try to get that Canning's Cove road done next year, and hopefully we can – we'll see. We do have the 25 per cent availability, the 50 per cent – the 75-75 I believe, that's the way that works with the amounts that are able to – because it's a living document.

Now, I also talk about the good work that myself and the Member for Terra Nova have been able to do because of the co-operation we have. When the Member for Terra Nova said to me: Do you support getting work done on the Port Blandford bridge? I said: Yes, I do, because it helps my district and it helps the people in my district. Because we were able to work together, we're able to get things done.

Instead of a lot of self-interest like you had on that side of the House, we've got people working together for the betterment of not just my district but for the District of Terra Nova as well, because what's good for Terra Nova District is good for the District of Bonavista and vice-versa.

I have about 11 minutes left, so I'm going to get to some other things I liked about the budget. I'm going to get one, maybe two more opportunities to speak.

I brought up a number of different things when I spoke to the Chamber of Commerce for

Bonavista-Trinity Regional Chamber of Commerce the week before last. A lot of the comments that I got from that group was that it was a good budget, a good step forward. The fear mongering that was put forward by that side of the House didn't come to fruition, they said, actually. It was a tough budget, but it was a budget that was needed.

For the first time I'd say in about five years there were absolutely no complaints about the delivery of health care at the Bonavista Peninsula hospital in Bonavista. One and two, every year, was always the Bonavista hospital and the College of the North Atlantic. Now, there's a bit of work to do at the College of the North Atlantic because that crowd had no focus whatsoever on the College of the North Atlantic, but our current Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour has put a focus on the College of the North Atlantic. I'm proud to say I'm going to be keynote speaker at the college tomorrow night for their open house, to talk about the good programs that we have there, the commitment that we're making to the communities.

When you get the fear mongering by the Third Party and their buddies about colleges closing down, that's absolutely not true – if you look at the announcement that was made last week, they're going to reinvest in the college. They're not like MUN. They're not afraid to look at their own books. They're not going on \$700 dinners. They're not insulting students by saying go eat a peanut butter sandwich.

The College of the North Atlantic is actually standing up and saying we can do better. They're looking at within. They don't want to close campuses. They want to provide regional hubs such as the campus in Bonavista. We've got some great programs there, a number of them being close to filled. We have some work to do on our plumbing and cooking courses but the other ones are full, and we can utilize our campus as a regional hub. It is the heart of the talk of the Bonavista Peninsula. So I'm proud to go there tomorrow night and speak and talk about the good things, the investments that we're making the College of the North Atlantic.

When I talked to the Chamber, I spoke about a number of different things and we recognize it

was a tough budget last year. No one on this side liked it. No one liked it because we faced a \$2.7 billion deficit. If we borrow like the NDP would have us borrow, we'd be bankrupt right now. They like to compare oh well, the NDP government in Alberta is borrowing, borrowing, borrowing. Well, they had savings in the bank and they're just on their line of credit right now while we blew through \$25 billion, we blew through our credit cards, the low-interest ones, and then we blew through the high-interest Canadian Tire card, and now we had to borrow where our position was next to junk.

We got ourselves in a position where we don't have to borrow every two or three months. When we borrow now, we are borrowing for the year and next year, Mr. Speaker. We don't have to borrow to pay our bills. Just imagine, the first time in the history of this province that we never had to borrow to pay our bills, not pay our employees, and not keep the lights on. That's a huge step forward.

This year, we got our deficit down from \$2.7 billion – which we faced going into *Budget 2016* – down to \$778 million. That's not much to brag about but given the reality that we faced, that's a significant step forward, Mr. Speaker, and I'm sure you would agree, and the good people of Baie Verte – Green Bay would agree as well.

One thing that I have to let people know, we made a promise. We didn't like to have to put this in place, but we had to put it in place to get our fiscal footing back on track. Now that we have our fiscal footing back on track, we're able to reverse some of the things that we had to put in place, such as the gas tax.

On June 1, you're going to see a reduction in the gas tax by 8.5 cents a litre. That is significant. On December 1, you're going to see that further reduced by another four cents. Then the other four cents is going to be reviewed with the fall fiscal update. We made a promise that this would be a temporary measure and we're keeping our promise.

We have to thank the good people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and I thank the good people in the District of Bonavista, for bearing the brunt of the poor management that the PC government put us through for 12 years.

Twelve years, Mr. Speaker, where they had \$25 billion to work with in oil revenues. It's unheard of.

They were planning their luxurious lifestyle based on \$112 barrel oil, Mr. Speaker. That was going to go on for years. What happened last year? We saw it drop down as low as \$26. So when you put all your eggs in the one basket, that's what happens.

They always get up to pontificate and say, well, you have no plan – you have no plan. A bit of a diversification plan that we actually have – and I talked about one thing is our infrastructure plan which gives the equivalent of 4,900 jobs a year over the next five years. That's not minimum-wage jobs, Mr. Speaker. That is good-paying construction jobs.

If you look at the focus on the fishery which there's been some controversy surrounding the fishery, we are sending a clear message to Ottawa that we want better control over our fishery. We want better management; we want better science. We can't go out and fish everything until it's gone; we need to have proper management. One of the key economic drivers, as stated in our Throne Speech, is the fact that groundfish is going to be one of the key components of our economy coming forward.

We have a shrimp fishery and a crab fishery that is in decline but we see the cod fishery coming back. So we want to work with the federal government to grow and support the groundfish industry. That \$100 million, the Fisheries Innovation Fund that we have, that's going to go a long way in helping us.

They'll talk about the \$280 million phantom fisheries fund that they had. They'll write letters to the editor about it; they'll brag about it. Not one person from the federal government showed up. When they threw the big party down at The Rooms, no one showed up. They never did get the \$280 million first or last. They never delivered a cent of the \$120 million that they promised from the provincial government. So we're going to use that money to invest directly into our fishery. We want to grow this industry.

Now, another big thing, talk about diversification. One of the most important

industries we have in the District of Bonavista is the tourism industry. I know the great District of Baie Verte – Green Bay has a great tourism industry as well; you've got some great things going there. I'd say the District of Bonavista is second to none when it comes to tourism. The hospitality you get there, the sense of welcome that you have, the amount of things you can do there, the amenities – we are focused on growing that industry in the District of Bonavista.

We are one of the few growth centres in the province, Mr. Speaker. We are growing, and we see new businesses come in. We see record numbers of tourists come into the District of Bonavista. They enjoy the experience.

Now, if they had a decent road to drive over in the Trinity Bight area, that would be all right, but because the former Finance Minister didn't care about that part of the district, we've got roads that we've got to try to get some good maintenance on.

**MR. JOYCE:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. KING:** Pardon?

**MR. JOYCE:** That where Trinity Pageant is?

**MR. KING:** That's where the Trinity Pageant is, and I think the Member for CBS is going to be the star there all summer.

But getting back to what I was saying about the tourism industry, we're focusing on doubling the amount of tourism dollars that we have coming into this province to \$1.6 billion, and the District of Bonavista, Mr. Speaker, is going to be front and centre for that.

If you look at the agriculture – and I've only got a minute left, and I'm going to have a couple of other opportunities to stand up and speak, and I love standing up and speaking in the House and talking about the beautiful and historic District of Bonavista, but our agriculture industry is booming. The provincial government held a livestock production seminar at the College of the North Atlantic the week before last.

It was well turned out. There were about 20 interested people there, learning about all aspects of livestock production. It's not very

prevalent in the district right now, but there's enough interest that we had the seminar there and we've got enough interested people who want to see this and make a go of it. So that's one thing I look forward to, plus we have Growing Forward 2 and PAAP adding additional funds to the agriculture industry, and the number of young farmers that we have, I'm excited about that industry. The next time I get up to speak I'm going to speak a great deal about that.

Thank you for your time.

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

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

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

It's indeed an honour to get up and speak again to the budget and to address the people of this great province of ours in the House. It's only 18 hours ago that I got a chance to get up and spend 20 minutes outlining my view on the budget, particularly my concerns about where it's not meeting the needs of the citizens of this province and acknowledging some of the things that are positive there.

I have no problem acknowledging that, but also acknowledging the fact that the whole concept here was about having a plan and a way forward. I still see no vision of that. I see no version of how that can work. I see no way of implicating how people can find a positive process out of this budget line. I'm going to get a chance to talk to that and a few things from yesterday.

I'll revisit last year's budget because you can't, in isolation, talk about 2017-2018 budget without referring to 2016-2017 because there has to be a transition. When you cut the bottom out of something, somewhere along the way you have to start to fill it in again if you want water to stay in that, and you haven't done that. So now not only are we having spillage where you got so much to come, what you're doing, there's full leakage. You're still hurting people. People are still worse off than they were before.

I want to correct – I very diligently listened to my hon. colleague for Bonavista. He got up and

he is very diligently fighting for his district and outlining the issues. There's no doubt, I agree, there are a number of roads up there in horrendous condition. I know, I spent three days travelling all over that part of the area as Minister of Transportation, and knew with the minimal amount of money for infrastructure, and my colleague, the present Minister of Transportation and Works, will outline we'd need billions more to do it, but you tried to pick what you thought was, at the time, the most necessary because of traffic flows or for safety reasons to address those needs. No doubt, we could continue to do it.

The hon. Member for Exploits is right. It's not only in that area. It's all over Newfoundland and Labrador. It's in parts of my community. If it's Portugal Cove-St. Philip's, Paradise or if it's on Bell Island, we've had those challenges. But we did, over the years, try to outline how we could invest in particular areas. We had regional staff who would come in and tell you things that needed to be done. No doubt, it always didn't get done in that fashion and you'd have to go back and say: Well, what you're proposing is \$15 million. We have \$1.5 million for that area. What can we do? What are the immediate things? So you made choices.

It wasn't always popular with citizens. It wasn't even popular with staff. It wasn't popular with the politicians of the day, but you try to do what had to be done. So I think the onus here, and the acknowledgement by all of us, is that we do have some big challenges here – nobody disputes that – in every sector, in our infrastructure particularly, in our roads, in our water and sewer, in our wastewater and all the things that are pertinent and important to people in Newfoundland and Labrador. We all try to do our part. There's no doubt, the ministers there will try to do that. But to make sure and to ensure that these communities also survive, you have to instill in people the faith that things can move forward.

I have to correct the Member for Bonavista on a couple of other things too. He had talked about next year will be the first time in our province's history that we had a balanced budget; that's not true. We had four or five balanced budgets and surplus budgets, which were used to go back in towards the deficit or invest back into

infrastructure to ensure that we had equity across this province, ensure that we had stability, but also ensure that people felt there was a reason to stay in rural Newfoundland and Labrador and in urban Newfoundland and Labrador and in any other areas that there would be business investments so they could be productive and they themselves could grow what they felt was their commitment and their contribution to their respective communities. So I have to clarify that.

The Member is also right. We did have, in a 10-year period, during the tenure of the previous PC administration, \$28 billion in oil revenues; it was a great time. The money came in; oil prices were up more than people thought. Great deals were negotiated around royalties, so we were getting more we thought. Productivity was up because we had managed to develop new platforms. Exploration had identified new areas.

So all the partnerships nationally and internationally had been developed; we'd had come a long way. Part of that \$28 billion went back in to support and service the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. It was their money. They deserved it. They had worked for it, but particularly they had sacrificed over years and years of having to rely on Ottawa to give us a few pittance every now and then when we were desperate for something, they had to rely on not being able to sustain certain industries, not having enough money to put into the fishing industry, as the Member had talked about, a very valued industry in Newfoundland and Labrador.

So we were fortunate, but we were fortunate because of design, because of what went on in the '70s and the '80s and the negotiations and the contracts that were put in play around the oil industry and the royalty regimes that said we weren't giving away things anymore; those days are gone. These are going to be ours. The people of Newfoundland and Labrador are going to benefit from them.

How do we do that? We ensure that we're open for business and we're open for partnerships, but partnerships that benefit everybody involved, not just the big oil industries or not just the Ottawa tax receivers but the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. That's what we ended up doing here and that's why \$28 billion it came in, no doubt – we'll never argue that;

we'll never dispute exactly the amount of money that came in here.

I have to note, too, that all the money that came in went out, and where did it go? Back in to improve the lives of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in different forms. Some of it was direct, some of it was indirect. Some they're now starting to see the benefits. Some of it was to be proactive in certain areas. Some of it was by being proactive you were looking for the future gains and the future benefits of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

I just want to note some of the monies that were put back into an investment for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador over the years. Let's talk about some of the things; \$6.28 billion has been spent on provincial infrastructure. That was to catch up on bridges, health care infrastructure, transportation infrastructure, municipal infrastructure, roads and buildings, education infrastructure.

There's not a person in this province who would argue, particularly educators – and when we talk about the challenges and I know we also have challenges in education and we probably will forever and a day until we get enough money and enough resources to be able to do exactly everything that's perfect, but we'll always have challenges.

None will tell you now the issues around mould and health issues within the school system. In particular, heavy safety things have been improved dramatically. Do we still have a ways to go? Of course we do. We still have six or eight schools that are in the queue now that are being built. So they'll improve the quality of education. That's one small example of the investments in infrastructure.

We're still looking for one up in the Southern Shore area because there's a big demand. When you have it in growth areas you need to be able to build what's conducive to the needs of the people, and have some vision that the future will obviously be attractive enough so you don't rebuild after and rebuild after, that you have an attraction that people will come for. We need to get to that point again.

We've got other ones that are still on the delay queue that need to be done, but I'll discuss that – that's another day for another discussion. What we're talking about here now is responding to where the money went. I want to outline, the money went back for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians where it always should. That was one of the other things we did.

Another \$3.7 billion went into gross domestic products. We invested back into what we were doing in Newfoundland and Labrador. We went back in to ensure that our products and that here were competitive and that we were doing things in the right vein.

Mr. Speaker, \$2.7 billion in labour compensation. Don't forget, for a number of years Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, the civil servants and the people that work, the teachers, the nurses, the doctors, the professionals, the civil servants, the plow drivers, the inspectors on the wharves, all the people who are part and parcel of keeping the services and ensuring that our province could move forward, were underpaid. They were the lowest paid in the country in most cases. They weren't given an opportunity to be engaged in other types of training, to be able to ensure that they were the best at what they did.

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** Lose their specialists, let them go.

**MR. BRAZIL:** That's right, exactly. That was the problem.

Our people, the people who work for the citizens of this province were noted internationally as being the greatest workers around, but it was hard to keep them because people have to survive themselves. They want to have a better quality of life for themselves and their children. To do that, you have to have a sustainable income. It's got to be something that's of value, and you have to be seen that you're valued within your workforce. It wasn't valued with the value of the amount of money we were paying people.

No doubt, people respected what they were doing, their bosses, the civil servants and the politicians of the day, but to really reflect that you had to give them a proper wage that was

competitive. It didn't have to be the highest. They weren't looking for that. So it was competitive so that they couldn't be drawn away from Newfoundland and Labrador, the place where they had honed their skills, the place they loved, the place where they had developed partnerships and had taken a leadership role in communities.

The administration of the day felt, you know what; we need to do that, because investing money there saves us money in the long run. It keeps our qualified, trained people here. It gives them a reason to be more engaged in their communities. It keeps our own skill set here and it develops the industries we're doing. That was a great investment there and it made sense.

We also invested billions into other infrastructure. We invested into additional health care, forest access roads. Let's talk about forest access roads and things like this; foreign animal disease laboratories, things that might seem small. Four million dollars out of \$28 billion might seem small but you add up 20 or 30 or those, not only do you have services that uniquely meet all the needs of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians but you also have industries that can grow. Everything is not about big oil industries, fishing industries, forest industries and the mineral industries. We understand that.

That's why I liked last year, when I heard what was coming from the Liberal administration, like diversification. I've said it 100 times, I was bought in. I was in on it. I was sold. I was just waiting for the detail. The old cliché, the devil is in the details. I was waiting for it, because I thought there was a master plan. I thought it was going to be wonderful. I said, I'm in. Let's take it. Let's go for the next – you'll deserve the government for the next 10, 12, 15 years if you have that plan in place. Unfortunately, the plan never materialized. It was never there. What continued to happen was about the \$28 billion that we had.

I'm going to explain again where some of that \$28 billion went; education and infrastructure, for example, arts and sciences; Grenfell, \$27 million – one institution, \$27 million, and rightfully so. It's a great area of Newfoundland and Labrador, a good investment, needed. No doubt, the Members out there saw it. I know the

citizens thought it was a proper engagement; core science facilities, \$9 million; again, another investment there, something that was – stuff that would also generate other particular industries and give other people a sense of pride of investing in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The College of the North Atlantic, \$21.7 million; that's Labrador West, one community, Labrador West and those two communities up there, very necessary because an industrial area that should be serviced, very necessary. A great investment and I think it's going to pay off dividends tenfold – tenfold. Again, that's not wasted.

New residence at Memorial University; as things were booming here we knew the cost of students coming here and housing. Newfoundland and Labrador had a boom on the Northeast Avalon, particularly around housing and the cost. It wasn't fair for our young students from Baie Verte or Twillingate to have to come in here and spend all their savings or not have enough in student loans because everything was going solely to housing. What did we build? Beautiful housing; \$65 million in housing, residences for university students.

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** Who were they for, students?

**MR. BRAZIL:** Students from all over Newfoundland and Labrador, international students, all over Canada to sell the wares of a great institution, Memorial University, and we did that.

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** That wasn't wasted, though.

**MR. BRAZIL:** Apparently, some people believe it was on that side. I don't think the people who live in it. I know the university don't, and I guarantee you the parents who felt that their kids were safe and were cared for in a great environment right next to the university, what a great ideal process to have – \$65 million.

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

**MR. BRAZIL:** Let's throw out a few other – schools that were replacing old dilapidated, outdated schools. Laval High School, Placentia,

another great area in Newfoundland and Labrador, \$13.5 million; French Shore Academy, Port Saunders, \$13.2 million. Another great investment for the people.

You're seeing a trend here, you're seeing a trend. It's not political. It's all over Newfoundland and Labrador. Investments are everywhere. It was never about the political part of it. It was never a stamp of what party was doing it. It was about the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Everybody had to earn that \$28 billion. They were going to get their part back. Rightfully so, and that's what we did.

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

**MR. BRAZIL:** Labrador Straits Academy, L'Anse au Loup, another great part of this great province, \$15.6 million. Another great investment, it's well deserved.

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

**MR. BRAZIL:** Lobbied for by their MHAs and delivered by the people of Newfoundland and Labrador from the PC administration because it was the \$28 billion that was owned by Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and they got their monies back for it.

Riverside Elementary extension and site improvements, Shoal Harbour, \$7.4 million – only part, we're missing something there but I won't get into that. That will be for a debate again; \$7.4 million there. We're still waiting on the –

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

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

The hon. Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island.

**MR. BRAZIL:** There are a few other schools I'll get to another time about ones that we had in play. A number of schools we had in play but got cancelled.

There may be a few Members over there who know about the schools that are cancelled right now, but we'll go back to it.

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** I know.

**MR. BRAZIL:** You know about it. There may be a few other Members there who may know about that, but we'll talk about that another time.

Let's talk about transportation infrastructure examples. Placentia Lift Bridge, another great part of our province that, as you know in that whole area, what's going to be developed down there, what impact that's going to have on the fishing industry, on the oil industry, on the tourism industry – what a great opportunity; a fair, substantial investment, \$51.9 million, but the right investment for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to replace a 50-year-old bridge and do it in such a way that it's professional and it draws business investments.

The Team Gushue Highway, \$61 million, to be able to make sure that the largest municipal infrastructure area has the proper transportation infrastructure that we draw – the Outer Ring Road was a great idea. A former Liberal administration started it, finished off by a PC administration, then another connecting road – all made sense; the people's money. It didn't make any difference what party was in power or who were the Members for it. It was all about giving to the people. It was their money. So everybody gets to earn from that. Anyone who comes into the Northeast Avalon for health services or education services or employment services have an opportunity to access those infrastructure facilities.

Bonavista community care residence: \$2.6 million, again another investment to take care of the needs up there.

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** Good investment.

**MR. BRAZIL:** Without a doubt. Called for the by the municipal leaders up there who worked with the MHAs of the area. Do you know what? We even had partnerships with federal MPs. It didn't make any difference what party they were because – and they bought into it – this was about Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. It was about giving them back their money and

making sure that everybody got their fair share. Their fair share was based on what their priorities were, and their priorities were done. All their priorities were done. Money was spent all over Newfoundland and Labrador.

Money was spent on all parts of Newfoundland, including the North Shore of the Bay of Islands, all kinds. Everybody approved for it. Everybody could address and access services that were done.

Let's talk about health care infrastructure. Boat Harbour community clinic: \$2.5 million, small rural communities but still deserving of the services, in need of services and delivered on the services.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. BRAZIL:** Labrador West – I'm glad the Member for Labrador West noted that because it falls right in line. Labrador West Health Centre, great facility.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** How much?

**MR. BRAZIL:** \$90 million, what a great investment.

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

**MR. BRAZIL:** Well deserved; \$90 million gone, great, well spent. No doubt, well deserved and well used up there as (inaudible).

Let's talk about some of the other – equipment because we've talked about infrastructure and building facilities, but if you build facilities, you have to make sure the box is not just the thing, it's about making sure that the quality of the people are in there. So we've taken care of that because we've made sure we give proper salaries to attract the best, to keep the best Newfoundlanders and Labradorians here, the best trained, to give them ways to be retrained, upgraded, fit into a system of better qualifications. We've done all that, so we've gone through that. This is where our \$28 billion has gone now.

Then we get into health care equipment. We've got to have stuff properly. People have to have it. It's no good being good at what you do if the

equipment is not conducive to you being able to do your job properly.

Mr. Speaker, dialysis equipment: \$8.2 million for dialysis patients, and we all know the challenges around that – an investment to ensure people's quality of life. The challenges that they go through on a daily basis, we want to –

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** Around the province.

**MR. BRAZIL:** And around. You're right, around the province.

It's unfortunate that the one in Harbour Breton no longer exists because we wanted to make sure everybody in rural areas had that. But this was about providing services to people, particularly those who may have some challenges around health care.

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** Where would they have gone to?

**MR. BRAZIL:** Oh, they would have – just to give you a couple of examples where they may have gone: Labrador, double dialysis investment up there, Gander, Burin, Carbonear, Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Harbour Breton – unfortunately, the Harbour Breton one no longer exists – Bonavista, St. Anthony, Labrador City, Port aux Basques and Fogo Island. Great investments all about proper health care, quality of life for people.

MRI equipment: \$10.5 million, a necessary piece of equipment for proper health care; X-ray machines, \$10.5 million; monographic equipment, \$13.9 million; ultrasound equipment, \$14.7 million. These are all investments in health care.

Linear equipment, \$15.9 million; CT scanners, \$20.8 million – we're up to \$125 million just in side equipment for an institute. That's side equipment. That's just diagnostic stuff. Additional treatment centres that we've done over the year: Tuckamore Centre.

We're talking about challenges we have in this province and we're seeing it now as it materialized even more and more. Imagine what state we'd be in if we didn't have these and we weren't proactive to put these in place.



Tuckamore; Happy Valley centre; Grand Falls-Windsor; Humberwood addictions treatment, \$3.6 million in Corner Brook; adult addictions treatment centre in Harbour Grace, \$6.9 million.

Hundreds of millions of dollars will all add up. I'll finish off the \$28 billion when I get a chance again, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. BRAZIL:** Thank you very much.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I remind the hon. Member his time for speaking has expired.

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

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

It was indeed an absolute pleasure to stand here again today and represent the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis for the beautiful people of Cape St. Francis.

Madam Speaker, just listening to my colleague speak I was writing down a few notes and stuff like that and trying to think about the different things because we all get an opportunity to speak on the budget. The other day, I had 20 minutes and I spoke about different things. It was very positive about things that are happening in my district and the great things that were announced last week. I spoke about volunteers.

It's interesting to listen to the debate when we hear on the other side of the floor the wastage of money, the wastage of the \$25 billion and stuff like that. Then my colleague gets up here and he done a great list. The thing about it is, Madam Speaker, over the last 12 years, and I've been only here for eight-and-a-half years, I saw large investments in our province. I saw great investments in our province and I saw a province with people with an attitude that we were the best. We are a great province; we're great people and everything else. I always go back to my days of working with a company that I worked with and I used to go do all these training courses on the Mainland. You'd always go in and there will always be one person in that

class that wanted to tell a Newfie joke. He thought it was always funny; it was a Newfie joke.

I can remember in 2005, probably 2006, that the Newfie joke was changing because we were termed as a proud people. We were a very, very proud people. When they did the Newfie joke, I used to put the joke back on them but we're the ones that our economy was booming. We're a province that is contributing to Canada and everywhere else in Canada and we're a very proud people. Back then, their attitude changed.

Not only did our attitude change about who we were as people, the rest of the people in Canada were looking at Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and saying, b'y, that's a great province. That's a great place to live and they're great people there. Over a period of time – and I understand, for years, there was the doom and gloom and we take the pittance from Ottawa to keep everything going because we were lucky to get it. We were lucky to get our transfer payments and we were lucky to get this – good thing Canada is taking care of them down there or they'd never (inaudible).

But the whole attitude changed. Was it related to our money coming in from oil and stuff like that? Yes, it was. Yes, it was. Was it the revenue coming in from – I'm not going to go back to the days when it was a Liberal government or it was a PC government or whatever it was, but we never had the revenue in this province to do the things that we needed to do.

When you look around this province today, I look at a province that has a great future. Our education level in this province is second to none. We have smart, intelligent young people that want to live here.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Are you talking about me?

**MR. K. PARSONS:** I'm talking about everyone. I'm talking about our whole attitude. The Minister of Education wants to know if I'm talking about him. I hope you want to live here, just like everybody else does.

I really believe that we needed to make these investments. I don't care if they were in Cape St.

Francis or they were in Bonavista, there were investments that needed to be done.

I'm going to just give an example. I know the Member just got up and he spoke about province wide and stuff like that, and I'd just like to speak of my district. I look at things that were wrong in my district – and again, not blaming anybody; I'm not blaming anybody for mould in schools; I'm not blaming anybody for the schools being old; I'm not blaming anybody for infrastructure being down. But we had a deficit and the deficit back then was our infrastructure. We just never had it – and that's not to fault – in order to be able to do anything, it's like your home. It's like what's happening in our economy today.

You cannot do anything with your home to improve home improvements unless you got the money to do it. Unless you got money to be able to put the new windows in, or you have to put that roof on – you don't have the money, then that's it, you have to live with it. You patch things up. Rather than get your shingles replaced, you go up and put a bit of tar and fix a few shingles and stuff like that. That's what happened in this province in the '70s, '80s and '90s, really.

It wasn't until 2000 – and fortunate enough, we were the government to be in power at the time, because the revenue changed. The revenue in this province changed, and there's no doubt in my mind mining played a major role. We're very fortunate with the mining and everything else. And our natural resources, for years that we had all these natural resources, really came through for us, and they came through in a big way because there was money generated from these resources.

So it's important to remember where we were to in Newfoundland and Labrador, where our attitude was to in Newfoundland and Labrador, and where people's attitude about us was to in Newfoundland and Labrador – and we changed it. We did a great job of changing – and I'm not saying government changed it. I think the people of Newfoundland and Labrador changed it, because the Newfie joke wasn't there anymore. People were looking at Newfoundland and Labrador in a different attitude, with a different attitude about our people.

Listen, b'y, they're doing something right down there. They're doing good things. Here's a province – everyone will look at equalization, and today equalization didn't pay off very well for us, because we look at other provinces around Canada – Quebec, \$10 billion; Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, \$1.7 billion, \$1.8 billion. If we had those revenues today, we wouldn't have the fiscal problems that we have.

But do you know what? Newfoundlanders and Labradorians took great pride in being taken off equalization. Here we are, we're the smallest, youngest province in Canada and we got taken off equalization because we did so well, because our leaders, our people, are hard workers, because we work hard, because we have an industry – and our resources came to show that, listen, that's a great province to live in.

We saw people move. We saw everything come up from our population to – back in the '70s, '80s and '90s, if you looked at a nurse, for just an example, that came out of Memorial University or came out of St. Clare's back then – it was St. Clare's nursing – and then she or he had a decision to make: Will I stay in Newfoundland for X number of dollars, or will I go somewhere in the rest of Canada and make probably twice as much money?

It's a huge decision for a person coming out with some debt and everything else and willing to start off their life. I can move to Alberta and – I'll just give an example. I can make \$40,000 in Newfoundland but I can move to Alberta and make \$80,000. I can move to Ontario and make so much more money. You wonder where our money has gone.

Guess what the nurse who comes out of these institutions today, where she wants to stay? Right here in Newfoundland and Labrador. The same thing as the doctors; they want to stay right here in Newfoundland and Labrador. Do you know why? Because we're on par with the rest of Canada now and people will look at our engineers and look at our professional people and realize that, listen, back in the '70s and back in the '80s, I understand they couldn't be paid, but do you know what? Today, we have more doctors. We have more nurses than ever before.

The reason being because they're treated equal, just like they are in Nova Scotia, as they are in Saskatchewan, as they are BC because it's just as good to work here as it is anywhere in the country because we increased their wages. They have the same opportunity to work as they did anywhere else, but now Newfoundland is – the attitude one time was: Listen b'y, if you chose to stay home, that's the way it is. You're going to get less wages. But we don't have to put up with that anymore, and we don't put up with it anymore. That's a great thing.

Our teachers, like I say, our professional people are getting paid similar to what they are all across Canada. Our RNC, our young police officers that I look at here every day – I'm very, very proud of them – are here because this is a great place to live. It's a great place to work. But do you know what? That all came at a cost and if you go back – and that cost to me, I'd spend it again tomorrow, because I think Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, we're as good as any people in this country and we should be treated the same way. Our professional people deserve the same wages that they're given in any other place in the world because this is a great place to live.

I tell you, there's no other better place, as far as I'm concerned – and again this is my personal opinion. I can't see a better place in this world to raise a family than here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

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

**MR. K. PARSONS:** And I think everyone here will agree with that. There's no doubt about it.

So there are things we need to do to make sure our families want to stay here, we want to stay here and it's important. Again, I go back to our pride in our people, our pride in our province, so we have to make sure that we do these things.

The Member again – I want to get off to where I wanted to go to in the first place but I'm after getting into it a little bit more. I really want to talk about my district. I going to explain a few things that happened with investments that we made. I tell you right now I don't know how much of the \$28 billion it is, but it was great investments.

The Holy Trinity School in Torbay – not the new one that was built last week that I'm talking about, this one that opened in 2008 and I really want to thank the late Jack Byrne; he did all the work on it. I was fortunate enough to be the MHA at the time when it opened but I'll tell you one thing, Jack Byrne did all the work on it. He was a great Member and a great man.

That school then went back – that was 60 years old; it had mould in it. You walk down the corridors and you could hear people walking. The people underneath could hear people going up and down the corridors in that school. It was a hard school. There were pieces built on, it was fixed, there was a roof that was leaking and stuff like that. Now they have a beautiful, new school down there. The high school is a new school. We have an elementary school. These are investments that we did in my district that I'm very proud of, what we did in education.

At St. Francis of Assisi over in Outer Cove, Logy Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cove, they had an extension done to their school. It was \$1 million worth of renovations. They had an extension of four classrooms and it's a beautiful school, absolutely beautiful – top technology. I talked to one of the teachers there and she said; Kevin, I'm teaching for 28 years, we're very fortunate here in Newfoundland and Labrador to have the technology. She said she could remember back when I was speaking about earlier, I guess the '80s and '90s, when there was only so much resources.

They don't use chalk today, Madam Speaker, but they use their whiteboards and SMART Boards, whatever they're called, but you had to watch that chalk. You used every bit of it until it got right down to the bitter end because there was no money to buy more chalk. Our technologies today and everything else that we have, our schools are better, our people are doing better.

I look at recreation, and I'll give you a great example again. I'm going to thank the former Member for Cape St. Francis. Again, I was the one who did the opening ceremonies and I wish he could have done it himself because it's called the Jack Byrne Arena now.

Just to give you an example, back when the Jack Byrne Arena first opened, minor hockey in the whole area had 167 children in it. That's 167 children that are playing minor hockey. They used to go to St. John's every Saturday morning for their practices. Their practices were from 6 o'clock in the morning to 9 o'clock. They'd get a half hour each, and that's all they'd do, get their half hour in each and they'd reverse around. So sometimes parents had to get up at 5 o'clock in the morning to get their children out there, but that was what they had to do; 167 children were involved in minor hockey.

I was always involved in minor hockey. I always played hockey, coached it and everything else. Today, the Jack Byrne Arena last year had over 800 minor hockey players – over 800 minor hockey players. Now somebody may say that was a waste of money, the investment we made in the Jack Byrne Arena. I don't think it's a waste of money. I think that those 600 or 700 children now have the opportunity to play minor hockey.

We look at the effects of sports and recreation that has on the health of people. Just look at what it has on our children; we get them out playing hockey. Right now, actually I met with the president of the Minor Hockey Association. They said we have so many children next year, they don't even know how big it's going to get because it's growing and growing and growing. We're all excited about it, and we don't even have enough ice time at the Jack Byrne Arena. We still have to go to St. John's, I think for 40 hours a week now just to cover it, but what a great investment.

Any time we can take our children from the couch to the hockey arena, to the soccer field, to the ball field, whatever it is, not only is it an investment in our children, it's an investment in our lifestyle and it's an investment in the health of the children. We do have a big issue in this province. We do have problems when it comes to the health of all of us really.

I try to exercise as much as I can. I play a little bit of hockey. I'm not very good at it anymore, but I do try to exercise. We all should be exercising. We all should be trying to live healthier lives or whatever. You know, just think about the investments in recreation.

I'll just mention my district. I am sure I could look over across the way and say that every district in this province over those 12 years that we were in power saw investments in recreation in their districts. Are those bad investments? When they get up and say, oh, they squandered \$25 million. They threw it out the door. You wouldn't know if we just took it and threw it out through the window and said there it is, gone.

Listen there were investments that needed to be made. Again, I'm not saying it was the PC government, the Liberal government, I'm not blaming anybody. I'm just saying the timing was right for us. The timing was right. If you got money and you get some extra money and your house has a leaky roof, it's time to fix the roof. You got to fix the roof. Use that money to fix the roof. There is no doubt about it. When you got some money and you need some work done on your yard or something like that, that's the time to do it. You've got to do that stuff.

That's what happened over these years. The Member just got up and listed off all these huge investments, \$50 million here and \$50 million here. I'm sure if you go through the whole list, there's nobody who would disagree with those investments, and especially if they're in your own district. You're not going to disagree with the investments in your own district.

You know what, Madam Speaker, we still have a little ways to go. We still have a little ways to go, but the problem I have – and I'll get back to my budget thing here now. The problem I have is, as I spoke, how proud our people are. How proud it is to live here, and what a great feeling it is to be a Newfoundlander and Labradorian. I really believe that because I feel it and I know the people in this province feel it.

What happened in this budget and what happened with this government across the way, they said they had a plan. The plan, everybody's going to like it, but they didn't have a plan. What happened in last year's budget is the same thing that's happening in this year's budget; like I mentioned the other day, even in the Budget Speech, reaching into people's pockets. I think we reached in too deep into the people's pockets.

There are some things sure, that we can look at and say, okay, maybe we can cut back on this or maybe we can cut back on that, but the effects of the budget taking \$6,000 out of people's pockets has a huge effect. It has an effect –again, the other day, I said it's like a snowball effect that it has on what people can actually spend.

I know the Minister of Justice, I can remember everyday getting up in this House of Assembly and I heard about dentures. Because what the plan was first, you give the top or the bottom. You only could take one at a time, and he talked about the dignity of people. That's the one thing that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have, we have dignity. None of us want to go on bended knee or anything at all, but we do have dignity.

The denture program, I know first when it started, it was either your top set of dentures or your bottom set of dentures. We realized it, and everybody in this House realized it, look, we want to be able to give that person who needs dentures dignity – dignity to smile. That's all. That's all it was about, but to cut the whole program altogether, seriously.

Like I said, there are some options we could have done, some different things we could have done. I don't say that everything you cut was – but there are some things you just can't cut. When it comes to a senior, and I have seniors in my district that tell me, Kevin, I got to go up – the over-the-counter drugs that they used to get. These items, Madam Speaker, are \$4, \$12. They're not high-end items. It's not like something they're going in to get that's going to cost \$150, but to a senior and to senior citizens who are trying to stay in their own homes, that we really want to stay in their own homes, \$20 a month or maybe \$30 a month when you're on a fixed income and you know where every single penny is going, that's a lot of money.

Those are the things that, you know, we talk about pride in our people and pride of who we are as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, we should be proud as legislators in here that we don't let that happen. We shouldn't let it happen because there are some things – listen, there is nobody – I'd love to see us have a billion dollars in the bank, but there are some costs that you

should just say, b'y, we got to take that. We can't do that to certain people.

That's what's happening today in Newfoundland and Labrador. There are a lot of people in this province that are really, really hurting. They are really, really hurting and they find it difficult to live. Like I said earlier, we're very proud people and I want to see all our young people stay here. I want to treat our seniors with the dignity that they deserve. I think, right now, this budget is no different than what the budget was last year. The problem is I don't think the people on the other side see it.

We just have to look at how we treat our people. How we treat our families. That will tell you who we are as individuals.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Yes, thank you, Madam Speaker.

Given the hour of the day, with the consent of my colleagues, I would suggest that we recess until 2 p.m.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** This House now stands in recess until 2 p.m.

### Recess

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

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

Admit strangers.

I wish to address the matter of caution which I had extended to Members yesterday with respect to references by a Member of this House to a member of the public who was formerly a Member of this Legislature. I urged Members at the time to be cautious in debate with respect to referring to former Members of this House by name as they are no longer in a position to defend themselves in this Assembly.

The O'Brien and Bosc reference used to support this caution is to Speaker Milliken's decision in

the House of Commons in 2005 and found in the House of Commons Debates on page 5933. At issue were Member comments critical of two former Members.

There had been an earlier decision of Speaker Fraser where the same caution that I had given yesterday had been issued.

Speaker Milliken determined that the Speaker Fraser ruling on comments made about a former Member were comments initiated by the Members themselves. The allegations made by the Member arose in the House and the former Member was not able to challenge any possible unfair criticism.

In the matter before him in 2005, Speaker Milliken distinguished the issues before him from the Fraser ruling. He stated that the references to a former Member were to public testimony and had already been reported in the public domain. Therefore less reliance could be placed on the earlier Speaker Fraser decision prohibiting the naming of an individual. The comment made before Speaker Milliken was therefore allowed.

I will refer to the comments made in the House of Commons at the time. The remarks that offended the parliamentary secretary make reference to testimony given in a public forum before an inquiry and widely recorded in various media.

I have carefully reviewed the situation to ensure the references made here in the House are already in the public domain and I am satisfied that that is indeed the case. If the disputed statements were thus not linked to reports in the public domain I might have been inclined to view the matter quite differently; however, under the circumstances I fail to see how I, as your Speaker, can enjoin Members from referring at all to the testimony or to those media reports that are already made public. To do so would be to impose upon Members of the House restrictions that go well beyond normal restrictions that apply outside the House.

Consequently, and for clarity, I will proceed in this House on the assumption that where facts and comments respecting a named individual who is a member of the general public, whether

or not a former Member of this Legislature, are clearly already in the public domain, a Member may comment upon those issues in this House.

However, a Member will not be able to stand in this Chamber and make personal, defamatory or derogatory comments about a member of the public, whether or not they are a former Member, where those comments originate with that Member and not by a member of the public, where the member of the general public have on context and are not clearly substantiated in the public domain.

Members in this House have the protection of parliamentary privilege and a freedom of speech during debate. There can be no legal action for slander or defamatory remarks arising from such debate. Individuals who are not Members of the Legislature have no such protection and it is therefore unfair to make unsubstantiated allegations or comments during debate under the protection of the House when the person about whom those comments are made did not themselves initiate the remarks and do not have the protection of the House or a defence against the unfounded allegations.

I would like to welcome to the public gallery two students: Joshua Smith Ford and Kayleigh Richards from Virginia Park Elementary School who will be the subject of a Member's statement today.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Also in the public gallery is Ian Chaytor from Conception Bay South, who is the subject of a Member's statement.

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

#### Statements by Members

**MR. SPEAKER:** For Members' statements today we have the Members for the Districts of Conception Bay East – Bell Island; Placentia West – Bellevue; Virginia Waters – Pleasantville; Topsail – Paradise; Exploits, and Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair.

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

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

Mr. Speaker, this past week I had the privilege of attending the best of Portugal Cove-St. Philip's business, sports and volunteer awards. Portugal Cove-St. Philip's resident Fred Hutton served as master of ceremony which saw 12 awards given in three categories.

The most moving moment came when the guest speaker, last year's youth of the year Portugal Cove-St. Philip's resident, Nathan Chaulk, who is this year's provincial Easter Seals youth ambassador, brought the message that every citizen has the ability and responsibility to serve as a volunteer no matter the challenges they face, and that the rewards for volunteering are immeasurable.

I would like to congratulate the following award recipients: Youth of the Year, Grace Codner; Senior of the Year, Ruth Bugden; Service Group of the Year, Portugal Cove-St. Philip's Lions Club; Volunteer of the Year, Bradley Moss; Male Athlete of the Year, Kyle Spurrell; Female Athlete of the Year, Kaitlyn Hall; Coach of the Year, Jonathan Lee; Team of the Year, Grade five Boys PUMA Basketball; Employee of the Year, Shannon Barbour; New Business of the Year, Brewkies K9 Bakery & Spaw; Developer of the Year, B&L General Contracting Limited; and Business of the Year, Sharpe's Store.

I ask all Members to join me in congratulating all award recipients.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

I rise today to pay tribute to an outstanding volunteer, the late Gordon Lomond of Marystown. Gordon joined the Lions Club 59 years ago in Port aux Basques and over his lifetime he served with Lions Clubs in Stephenville and Marystown. He held most positions on the executive, including treasurer and president. He also served a term as Deputy District Governor for his Lions district.

Mr. Lomond was also a committed member of the Heart and Stroke Foundation, founding the Marystown – Burin Chapter and serving on the executive for over 15 years, and was still a member at the time of his passing.

He was instrumental in the towing of a church from St. Joseph's to Marystown, and continued his staunch support of his church for life. As a Eucharistic minister, he would go on to become a licensed lay reader at the ripe age of 78 years old.

Gordon Lomond loved to be of service to community, family and faith. He leaves behind a beautiful wife, Sadie, children Geoff, Jackie and Scott, and a community for which he has been a pillar for many, many years and who now say a profound thank you, Gordon, for all you have done, leaving this world a far, far better place.

Thank you, Gordon.

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

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

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

I rise in this hon. House today to celebrate an incredible opportunity that two students in my district received.

On April 25, 2017, two students from Virginia Park Elementary, named Joshua Smith Ford and Kayleigh Richards embarked on a journey of a lifetime. The two students were chosen to accompany six others from the province as part of the Dreams Take Flight program on a one-day trip to Disney World. This program, offered by Air Canada, works with community organizations and schools to provide this opportunity to deserving children.

Josh and Kayleigh joined the Atlantic Canadian cohorts in Halifax and woke up at 5 in the morning to fly to Orlando for an all-expenses paid adventure to Disney's Magic Kingdom. They were given the red carpet treatment in Disney World and didn't have to wait in any lineups. They even got to eat as much candy as they wanted, all thanks to the generous

contributions from the partners of the Dreams Take Flight program.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating these two students on their wonderful experience, and thanking all those involved in the Dreams Take Flight program for their hard work and dedication.

Thank you.

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

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

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

I rise today to recognize a Conception Bay South resident, Mr. Ian Chaytor, who has been involved in soccer as a player, a coach and administrator for 45 years.

Ian has been part of the Conception Bay South Soccer Association for 15 years, both as a coach and at the board level and is Provincial B Coaching Certified. On April 7 of this year, Ian was awarded Executive of the Year during the Newfoundland and Labrador Soccer Association Hall of Fame induction ceremonies.

For the past number of years, Ian has had a hand in many aspects of growing the game in Conception Bay South. In addition to his role as president, Ian took on a lead role in two major soccer events hosted by CBS and the Newfoundland and Labrador Soccer Association.

In CBS, Ian assumed the role as Soccer Convener for the Newfoundland and Labrador Summer Games and also at the 2016 Senior Men's and Women's national Championships, Ian was a member of the host committee with responsibilities for overseeing the CBS soccer facility. In addition to his logistical duties, Ian also found time during these events to serve as one of the games announcers for television broadcast of the games.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, if you're ever looking for Ian, just go to the soccer field, you'll find him.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating and thanking Ian Chaytor on his accomplishments and his efforts in soccer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

I rise today to recognize the Grand Falls-Windsor Cataracts, who recently won the 2017 Allan Cup, the biggest prize in Canadian national senior hockey. This championship has been held since 1908, making it one of the oldest club-team hockey competitions in North America.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Almost as old as you, Jerry.

**MR. DEAN:** Yes.

This tremendous achievement comes on the heels of the Cataracts having played in the finals for the league championship of the Central West Senior Hockey League, narrowly missing out on a victory in a seven-game series.

The Cataracts were also the Herder Memorial Trophy winners in 2016, making them one of the most decorated teams in Newfoundland and Labrador's history.

Mr. Speaker, only two other teams have won the Allan Cup for Newfoundland and Labrador in the long history of this tournament – once in 1986, and again in 2011.

They defeated the Lacombe Generals 7 to 4 at the championship in New Brunswick and did our whole province proud. Mr. Speaker, we are one of Canada's smallest provinces by populations, but we are still a force to be reckoned with on the ice.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating the Cataracts on their outstanding performance this season.

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



**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair.

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

I rise today to recognize the 30th anniversary of the Labrador Straits Historical Development Corporation – an organization that has shown tremendous leadership in culture and heritage tourism in my district over the past three decades.

The organization has been led by a number of dedicated community-minded individuals since its incorporation in 1987. I'd like to acknowledge the contributions of people like Cindy and Doug Robbins, who have been involved for more than 25 years; Margaret Buckle and Lawrence Normore, whose vision and leadership have served the organization well since its inception, and hard-working and long-time employee Bonnie Goudie.

Apart from promoting community ties, the Development Corporation has done a marvellous job in preserving built heritage in the area. The Gateway Complex serves as an entry point into Labrador, and an introduction to all the culture and tourism offerings in the region.

Sites like the Point Amour Lighthouse offer visitors a glimpse into Labrador's rich maritime heritage that stretches back for centuries.

It was a privilege to join the Development Corporation's anniversary celebrations, and to recognize how instrumental this organization has been these past 30 years.

I ask all hon. Members to please join me in congratulating the Labrador Straits Historical Development Corporation on reaching this wonderful milestone.

Thank you.

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

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

#### Statements by Ministers

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

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

I recently had the wonderful opportunity to attend a graduation ceremony for the newly created Transitions to Work Pilot Program. That ceremony was in Corner Brook, and it was truly inspiring to see the dedication and enthusiasm of the graduates there.

Transitions to Work, Mr. Speaker, was implemented in January of 2017 through the merger of the former Employment Transitions and Sector Skills programs. It now provides Newfoundlanders and Labradorians with the support they need to secure entry-level employment and financial independence. Compared to the two previous programs, Transitions to Work enhances pre-employment support and job search assistance and introduces new approaches to job placement services as well.

To date in 2017, Transitions to Work has been offered in five locations: Stephenville, Corner Brook, Marystown, Carbonear and St. John's. A total of 58 participants have completed the pilot program in 2017 thus far, including some of our most vulnerable residents who truly need support and they're getting it through Transitions to Work. Transitions to Work will be next offered in Grand Falls-Windsor beginning this month.

With funding through the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Job Fund Agreement, I am very pleased, Mr. Speaker, that we will continue to deliver and assess the valuable Transitions to Work Pilot Program.

Thank you very much.

**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 advance copy of his statement. I would like to recognize those individuals who have gone through the Transitions to Work program. I would also like to recognize that all governments must play a

vital role in assisting the vulnerable members of our society to overcome employment barriers.

Overcoming such barriers provide individuals with financial independence, stronger physical and mental health and a sense of purpose. There are a multitude of reasons why an individual might find themselves in difficult situations to overcome employment barriers. Quite often, those individuals would be left without a means to live a quality of life. Transition programs and supports are key to providing those people with the tools to create opportunities for themselves.

This side of the House recognizes the efforts put forward by these individuals and wish them well in their future endeavours.

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 an advance copy of his statement. It's good to see that this pilot program is a success, and congratulations to everyone who has participated to date. Getting a job is often a job in itself and it is good to see people getting help finding employment and financial independence.

I hope the minister will recognize the still existing need for many adults to get their GED and take action to return ABE to the College of the North Atlantic.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

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

Mr. Speaker, we're committed to exploring new ways to manage road improvement projects for the betterment of the travelling public.

In recent years, there has been much public conversation related to nighttime construction

and the potential benefits to the province. It is viewed by many as a way to help reduce slowdowns and interruptions during the day when there are more people on our highways.

I am pleased, Mr. Speaker, to inform my hon. colleagues that this summer, the Department of Transportation and Works is moving forward with a pilot project for nighttime construction.

A contract has been awarded to Concord Paving Limited of Carbonear to complete a paving project on the Trans-Canada Highway from Kenmount Road to the Salmonier Line at night.

Testing nighttime construction for road work is a commitment of *The Way Forward* and part of our efforts to improve the way we do business.

Mr. Speaker, the safety of motorists and construction crews will be, certainly, a priority of our government and will be a key consideration in this particular project. The pilot will also test the effectiveness and the value of construction at night. A report will be prepared at the end of the project which will consider such factors as safety, productivity, cost and the impacts on motorists and residents.

Mr. Speaker, we look forward to conducting this pilot and to sharing the results with residents early next fall.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

I want to thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. Mr. Speaker, of course we welcome any initiatives that make improvements for the travelling public and we are supportive of testing nighttime construction for road work.

As we all know, we have a short construction season in our province and nighttime construction may help alleviate some of the issues associated with that. Of course, as in all construction projects, every effort must be made

to ensure the safety of the workers, contractors and the travelling public.

I look forward to seeing the results of the pilot and hope it will offer many insights on the value of nighttime construction in our province.

Thank you.

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

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

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

I, too, thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. Road maintenance has to be done and people also have to use the roads. Nighttime road work is an obvious solution. It has been done in other jurisdictions for decades.

The stretch to be done at night is very busy during the day. It is a good place to start, and I thank the minister for that. I applaud this move, but stress, as the minister has done, that the safety of the workers and the travelling public is key.

Thank you.

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

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

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

**MR. MITCHELMORE:** Mr. Speaker, today I rise in this hon. House to acknowledge the seven Tony Award nominations for *Come From Away*.

Shining brightly on Broadway's Gerald Schoenfeld Theatre in New York City, *Come From Away* has become a smash hit in the New York theatre scene. Playing to sold out shows, fabulous reviews and now, a nomination for the most prestigious honour in theatre, a Tony Award for best musical.

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

**MR. MITCHELMORE:** In addition, the *Come From Away* writing team of Irene Sankoff and David Hein also received nominations for best original score, best book for a musical and musical score. In all, *Come From Away* garnered seven Tony Award nominations in what I'm told was a very competitive year on the Broadway scene.

*Come From Away* is an excellent portrayal of our genuine kindness, generosity, understanding, inclusion and acceptance during one of the darkest moments in recent history.

I attended *Come From Away* in late March, and was humbled by the amazing reception of our story of goodwill.

Mr. Speaker, I felt immense pride when patrons rose to their feet with a standing ovation, knowing that this was an honour to the fine people of Gander and surrounding area. The simple focus of *Come From Away* makes theatregoers feel good about themselves, and how we as a community, when tested, can rise above any challenge.

I invite all hon. Members to join me in congratulating *Come From Away*, and its nomination for Broadway's biggest honour.

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. I, too, have seen the show and it was indeed extraordinary.

We join with government in congratulating *Come From Away* on their seven Tony Award nominations; a massive accomplishment that is certainly worthy of recognition.

It's been amazing to see the incredible interest this show has garnered. Not only to people in this province, but to folks around the world. It's become, as they say, the talk of the town.

As a citizen of Newfoundland and Labrador, I'm very proud of this success. This show is a feel good, uplifting story that speaks to the very best that humanity has to offer. We have long known of our people's kindness, generosity and caring ways. Now the rest of the world can see this as well.

We wish the cast, crew and writers all the best, hoping they can turn seven nominations into seven awards, but no matter what the result, we're all very proud of their accomplishments. They've represented us very, very well. Bravo!

Thank you.

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

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

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

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

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. The people of Gander and area were astounding in their generosity on 9/11. Who would have imagined it would be celebrated in such a fantastic way. They did what came naturally. *Come From Away* is a testament to that and a call forth to everyone to share, to live that generosity.

Congratulations to the storytellers, to our people who inspired this story, and to our own Petrina Bromley and Romano Di Nillo for being part of performing this wonderful story.

Seven Tony nominations, Bravo!

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

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

I have to admit, I was once guilty of scooping you on the bravo as well.

I'm going to ask for leave of the House. It's now 2:30, it being Private Members' Day we normally start Private Members' Day at 3 o'clock. I'll ask direction, actually, from the House. Will we continue with Orders of the Day and go beyond 3 p.m., or will I cut it off at 3 p.m. and start Private Members' Day?

**MR. A. PARSONS:** We'll go to Question Period (inaudible) skip out of here.

**MR. KENT:** Yeah, we don't have any questions.

**MR. SPEAKER:** So will I call Private Members' Day immediately following Question Period?

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Yes.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Okay.

### Oral Questions

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the people of the province are shaking their heads again today upon learning of another political appointment. The former Liberal vice-president and co-chair of the 2015 election campaign has been rewarded with a senior position in the Department of Health. I'm told there was no competition for this position.

I ask the Premier, the Premier of the province, the head of the government – I ask the Premier to explain what merit-based process your Liberal friend Jamie O'Dea went through before being awarded this position?

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

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

The individual concerned has a set of skills in relation to clinical trials, oncology and management, and is currently seconded from Eastern Health to the department to provide those skills at a time when the NLPDP in particular has an acute and pressing need for them.

It is not unusual, and indeed, it is encouraged as far as I'm concerned, that staff in the departments and the regional health authorities, mingle in this way so that we can benefit from

skills and enlarge their experience. I see nothing inappropriate in this at all.

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

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

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

Today the minister says they intermingled, yesterday he said they're an autonomous agency.

I ask the Premier: Is it correct that you terminated the position of a director of pharmaceutical services and then created a position of director of drug programs so you could reward your 2015 campaign chair?

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

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

I will not be speaking to individual HR issues out of respect for the individuals involved. There was a vacant position within the Pharmaceutical Services Division. We have a pressing need for people with experience in clinical trials.

As was mentioned in Estimates the other day, the NLPDP is under significant cost pressures. Generic drug purchases have yielded probably their maximum in terms of cost-effectiveness, and we need now to start looking at clinical trials and brand data. We also have pressing need on the federal scene for skills in oncology drugs and these skill sets are ones that this individual brings from Eastern Health.

Thank you.

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

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

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

The minister says he won't speak to individual HR matters then he goes ahead and speaks to it.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier: What officials in the Premier's Office had knowledge of the former clerk's conflict of interest and your special arrangement with the former clerk?

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

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

As I've mentioned so many times this week in this House of Assembly in response to this particular issue, there was no special arrangement. What we had in place was a contract with the former clerk. We've tabled that contract.

Mr. Speaker, there were conflict walls that were established. There was a list that was shared with the Department of Justice. That list was shared with Cabinet Secretariat. We've been through this so many times this week. No special arrangement. There was an amount of time to deal with the number of issues that the former clerk wanted to deal with before transitioning, and, Mr. Speaker, we just simply ran out of time and the clerk resigned.

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

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

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

Well, the clerk himself has said there was an arrangement with the government.

Democracy Watch says that they've never heard of a transition period for high-ranking public servants who are in a conflict of interest.

I ask the Premier: Why did you allow for a transition period, or is this something you just created or made up on your own?

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

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

Well, I'm sure the former premier and now the Leader of the Opposition would know, because we've seen a period of time, whether it was one day or six months or seven months or whatever period of time – I'm sure the Member opposite

would understand, because I'm guessing there would have been circumstances in his own practice, in his own career that we would have ran into situations even within government allowing individuals to transition into public life.

Mr. Speaker, in this particular case, if you go back to last September, as an example, we were dealing with some serious issues within government. There were certainly skill sets that would have helped us and there was a lot of progress that was made, I would say, Mr. Speaker, when you go back from September to where we are today, how we reshaped and realigned the public service within the province, and the former clerk was a big part of that work that was done.

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

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

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

Government policy prohibits a former clerk from being engaged with any work involving government or government entities for one year following their departure from public service.

Will the Premier give assurance to the people of the province that the former Liberal clerk will follow this policy?

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

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

For those people that would know the integrity of Mr. Coffey, I am certain that within the rules that apply to an individual like Mr. Coffey, that clearly he would do that, Mr. Speaker. I have no doubt in my mind, just like when we put in section 11 in his employment contract and so on, when asked the questions about that, he had the answers. His intention was to transition from private practice into public life.

Mr. Speaker, as I said so many times, we just ran out of time there. I'm confident, knowing the integrity and what he's done already in our province affecting and impacting many of the things, especially within our health care system.

As I've mentioned before, whatever rules apply, Mr. Coffey will be there to abide by them.

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

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

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

We know the Premier always likes to find someone else to blame or make someone else responsible but he's the Premier and he has a responsibility as well.

I ask the Premier: Have you informed Mr. Coffey that he's obligated to keep his hands off government files and issues for a 12-month period following his employment?

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

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

We've had a discussion with Mr. Coffey on his exit. I'm sure that in his resignation he understands. Mr. Speaker, he understands the role and where he would have been and where he is today.

Mr. Coffey has resigned as a clerk and he's now – whatever the next phase in his life. I didn't have a discussion with him, if he's going to be a lawyer or whatever he's going to do. It's up to him to determine whatever he's going to be, but I will assure you this, Mr. Speaker. I'm confident that if Mr. Coffey is ever in a conflict of interest he would be a gentleman, he would be the professional, that he would declare that. He understands quite clearly what – in the legal round – it is he's permitted to do, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

Premier, can you indicate if any out-of-court settlements or agreements occurred between Mr. Coffey and any government entity during his time as clerk?

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

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

I think there was an indication from the discussion that I had on the weekend that there was a settlement that might have occurred within one of the health authorities somewhere, but that's as much as I can speak to that. I know the list had been shed. There was a fair amount of progress that had been made on the list that we discussed in the beginning, as was discussed with the Justice Department, Mr. Speaker. So he was winding his practice down, hoping to get into, obviously, getting these clients or getting these files out of the way.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, the transition period was taking much longer than we anticipated and he made a decision to resign.

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

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** So, Mr. Speaker, this is new. Only after asking questions several days do we learn there was a settlement occur between Mr. Coffey and a health authority.

We just heard the Minister of Health just a few moments ago speak about the relationship and moving staff back and forth. That creates an even bigger issue about conflict.

Premier, can you tell us more about this conflict or this issue, this settlement? What was the value of the settlement achieved by Mr. Coffey on behalf of his client against the government?

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

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

In this particular case, I know the Member opposite has asked about Nalcor and ongoing – and conflict of interest, and I've explained the Nalcor situation many, many times.

As I said, Mr. Coffey's objectives were to shed these files and to get those completed. So the details around what that settlement would have

been, I would imagine that would be between the client and whoever was opposite to that.

Mr. Speaker, as I've mentioned so many times this week, the conversation occurred between Mr. Coffey and with the deputy minister and Health and Community Services to make them aware of where things were and as that progressed.

Mr. Speaker, I have also said that when you look at the Cabinet table and so on, these types of decisions would never happen there. I'm sure the Members opposite would be aware of that.

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

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Mr. Speaker, the Premier is speaking about a direct conflict of interest that occurred while the clerk was in office here. This is new and very serious information and a very serious circumstance.

I ask the Attorney General: Were you aware of this settlement? Do you agree that this was permissible, that this was proper and this was ethical for the clerk to have a settlement with the department under the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador? As the Attorney General, do you believe this was correct and just?

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

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

At the time that Mr. Coffey was hired, he did meet with a solicitor from Justice and instructions would have been provided on how to avoid any perceived conflict of interest. The same way that Mr. Coffey would have met with the Cabinet Secretariat, the Premier's Office following the provisions of the *Conflict of Interest Act*.

The Attorney General would have no role in understanding whether there are settlements or cases like that. In fact, the way the *Conflict of Interest Act* is written, it is up to the individual to disclose a conflict of interest to their deputy

minister or to their minister. So as the Attorney General, I would not be privy to that and I certainly think the Member opposite would know that.

Thank you.

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

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

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

I ask the Premier: Will you table the details of the settlement?

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

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

The details of the settlement would be, I guess – I don't have those. That would be within the parties that the settlement was arranged. I couldn't tell you that settlement, whatever the amount is, Mr. Speaker.

What I know is that with a conflict of interest, as the minister just mentioned, the onus and responsibility is on the individual or even the other party that would be negotiating in the room at that particular time. If they consider or see that there would be a conflict of interest, it's up to those parties to actually either say that you feel this person is in a conflict of interest, or the responsibility on the individual themselves to determine or to actually come forward with a potential conflict of interest.

Mr. Speaker, that's the way it works. The responsibility and the onus is on that individual.

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

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, the responsibility and the onus rests with the Premier of the province who knew about this in the first place.

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** The Premier knew about this and allowed it to happen. He knew about it and allowed it to happen, Mr. Speaker. Nothing could be a larger breach of judgment, of poor judgment and of his own responsibilities as the Premier.

We have a Finance Minister who stood and said that she heard about it through the media. When settlements are reached it impacts the public purse.

I ask the Minister of Finance: Do you believe it was appropriate for a settlement to be achieved with the clerk, and did you know about it before that settlement was reached?

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

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Mr. Speaker, as the Member opposite would be aware; any settlement inside the regional health authority would be the purview of the management and the board as it relates to the regional health authority. I would not have, as Minister of Finance, visibility into that settlement. I have no information to add based on his question.

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

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Mr. Speaker, I can't believe what we're hearing today. After asking for questions and disclosure and openness and transparency, finally the Premier divulges to the people of the province that the clerk acted directly in a conflict of interest while he was in the role of the clerk and the Premier allowed it to happen.

Premier, a lapse in judgment, wrong for you, you never protected the government. You never protected the people of the province.

Now will you rise in your place and do the right thing and resign?

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

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



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

Thank you for the opportunity. No, I will not be resigning, Mr. Speaker.

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

**PREMIER BALL:** We've been through the rhetoric and the comments and we've listened to the Members opposite. When I think of going back to Humber Valley Paving, Mr. Speaker –

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

**PREMIER BALL:** – the Leader of the Opposition was a minister in Cabinet. He was also a minister who actually worked on the Humber Valley file. So we've seen examples of this from the Member opposite as he stands here today and he uses his selective memory, I would say, Mr. Speaker, selective memory. He wants to forget about his own actions, Mr. Speaker.

The onus and the responsibility is on the individual to declare that conflict. There were mechanisms that were put in place. It was shared with the Department of Justice. It was shared with the deputy minister, Mr. Speaker. The onus was on the individual to declare that conflict.

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

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

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

Mr. Speaker, in Estimates, the minister stated the government had not budgeted for the relocation of Crown Lands to Corner Brook. This is a big move involving potentially 30 employees.

I ask the minister, your government made a decision to move Crown Lands to Corner Brook, why didn't you budget for it?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources.

**MR. CROCKER:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in our government's decision to move Crown Lands we looked at factors that would help this new department realize savings, and not only realize savings, but realize efficiencies.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things we found when we looked at the realignment of this new department is there were four mapping divisions. For example, one here in St. John's and three in Corner Brook.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things we have to look at when moving the positions to Corner Brook is we're not quite sure yet how many people will accept those new positions. Mr. Speaker, I can assure the Member opposite, we're going to work with our employees, we're going to work with our union to accommodate their needs to the best of our ability.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

The minister said the money for relocation will be found in the existing structure through his department.

I ask the minister: Do you stand by your statement?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources.

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

Mr. Speaker, for a Member who actually was involved in a government department previously, he would understand, or he should at least understand, that when you look at budgets in a department there are no line items for such things as severance or retirements. These monies, for any people who decide to take positions in Corner Brook, will be found in those lines.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

Mr. Speaker, Finance officials told us in a briefing last week that there are no contingency funds in departments – interesting.

I ask the minister: Where is the funding coming from to support your move to Corner Brook?

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

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Mr. Speaker, the Member opposite may not understand, and I'll certainly take the opportunity to explain it to him. As the minister has said, severance pay, the policy is that departments would continue to look inside their own spending envelope to see if they have the availability for that. If they don't, then the Finance Department, as it has under this administration, as it had under that administration, has available funds to be able to deal with those issues.

Mr. Speaker, I can assure the Members opposite that we will do everything we can to ensure a respectful transfer that takes into account the lives of our employees.

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

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

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

I want to remind the Minister of Finance, that my question was directed to the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources. Her officials told us in a briefing, told my colleagues, you couldn't do it. So who is right, you or your officials?

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

**MR. PETTEN:** Mr. Speaker, are you expecting that Crown Lands employees won't move to Corner Brook? Is that the real reason you didn't budget for this relocation?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources.

**MR. CROCKER:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Member is satisfied to stand up here and fear monger around people's decisions and people's lives. We're not going to do that, Mr. Speaker. We're going to work with the employees of Crown Lands. We're going to work with their bargaining unit. We're going to work with their department to ensure that we make this transition in the best possible way, and if there's a way we can accommodate these employees in any way possible, we're certainly going to do it.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**MR. KENT:** Mr. Speaker, fatal overdoses related to fentanyl have risen exponentially in Canada in the last couple of years and now there have been two recent deaths here in Newfoundland and Labrador, that's two too many. There's more that can and should be done. While government's opioid action plan was a start, there are major gaps.

For instance, will the Minister of Health commit to making naloxone kits available in our province's pharmacies, similar to what has been done in places like Ontario?

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

**MR. HAGGIE:** Thank you very much for the question.

Mr. Speaker, I agree, to an extent, with the Member opposite, that two fatalities are two too many. What I would say is that the plans and preparation that were put in place between the department and the regional health authorities have actually saved 14 lives in two weeks. I don't think that is something that should be forgotten in this.

In regard to the specific question about naloxone, pharmacies in this province have them currently. We have kits that are still available for individuals and community groups; 811 can provide access to those kits.

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

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

**MR. KENT:** And I agree with the minister to an extent. The efforts of our first responders in recent weeks have been absolutely heroic.

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

**MR. KENT:** But calling 811 is not enough. We aren't reaching those who are at greatest risk. Naloxone kits are dispensed free of charge at over 1,000 pharmacies in Ontario. Kits are only available at our pharmacies if you can afford them. Today, pharmacies only have access to the commercially available kit that cost \$85. The free kits being distributed by government cost about \$14.

Why won't the minister commit to immediately distributing kits province wide to our 50 addictions and pain clinics?

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

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

Our naloxone kits, the ones to which the Member alluded that were distributed and put together with the aid of SWAP and some community groups, are available in addictions clinics. They are available for any group or any individual who feels that they would benefit or have others with them who would benefit.

The issue of availability is moot as there are still kits that have not been sought or claimed. There's still capacity in the system, 811 is simply a contact point whereby individuals who want those kits can find out how to get them.

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

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

**MR. KENT:** Mr. Speaker, in my own community there's a clinic that has 100 patients coming every day, seven days a week, and there is no naloxone kit provided. In the government's current opioid action plan, there is no mention of any role or involvement for pharmacists. They see people every day who are at risk. Pharmacists are trained to give injections and they can also educate those that need instruction.

I ask the minister: Will you follow Ontario's lead and engage our province's pharmacists in tackling this crisis?

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

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

I've had meetings with both PANL and the Pharmacy Board about drug issues and naloxone kits. Once again, there are kits to be had. Any clinic that feels it needs them, any individual that feels it needs them, has the opportunity to access them and I would encourage them to do so.

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

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

**MR. KENT:** Mr. Speaker, I had someone call 811 yesterday. They took a message. They were called back and told, yeah, go to Pleasantville and we'll train you how to use a kit. How is that a province-wide solution for our pharmacies and for our 50 addictions clinics?

As of today, Royal Newfoundland Constabulary officers still have not received training on naloxone. We cannot afford to wait any longer.

Will the Minister of Justice commit to immediately addressing this problem and provide all first responders with appropriate tools and training?

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

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

The first thing I would say is that obviously as Minister of Justice and Public Safety I'm actually not responsible for all first responders in the province. That responsibility falls on a number of different departments.

It does give me an opportunity to reference one of the incidents very recently which was at Her Majesty's Penitentiary where we did have an overdose. This is an opportunity publicly right now for me to thank the first responders there, the guards who took the time and saved that person's life by administering NARCAN and providing CPR. Thanks to the training and the presence of those kits there, we managed to save that life.

So, again, I'm sure steps will be taken to address this issue which is national and which is growing. Certainly, we're not immune to it. Thankfully, we do have good front-line staff here reacting on a day-to-day basis.

Thank you.

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

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

**MR. KENT:** Mr. Speaker, our first responders have done an exemplary job. In fact, many lives have been saved as a result of their efforts but there are still lives being lost during this crisis.

Public engagement and education needs to be much stronger as well. Government's fentanyl information sheet that has been sent to schools is not adequate. It's poorly presented and even suggests that media reports have been inaccurate on this issue.

Will the Minister of Education commit to immediately improving information and resources available to our schools and available to our educators?

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

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

It's interesting the Member opposite references the information sheet that has the Department of Health and Community Services stamp on the bottom. As recently as yesterday, we have edited it and revised it in the light of feedback and will continue to do so.

If the Member opposite has some constructive comments as to how he would like us to edit it, please feel free to let me know. It's a work in progress.

Thank you.

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

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

**MR. KENT:** Mr. Speaker, I'm relieved to hear that it's being revised and I'm happy to help with that process.

People are dying. Despite the minister's statements back in January, the crisis is here and it's real.

Will the Premier immediately establish a new task force, coordinating efforts between the government departments of Health, Justice, Education, Children, Seniors and Social Development, and engaging key community partners like the SWAP and Street Reach?

We need to move much faster. We need stronger action and we need leadership now.

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

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

When you look at how you respond to any particular actions, the swiftest way to do it is leave it in the hands of a minister, like our Minister of Health and Community Services. As the Member opposite just talked about, what is required is swift action to this real tsunami, as some people would call it, sweeping across our nation.

The department will be responding, but we will give every single Member, every single Member an opportunity to feed into what some people are calling a crisis, Mr. Speaker.

One life lost is one life too many. Let's get to work together on this particular issue.

**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.

The Chief Medical Examiner's office is currently being reviewed by the Chief Medical Examiner of Nova Scotia who has already pointed to a serious problem with understaffing.

I ask the Premier: Will he commit to putting the necessary resources in place immediately when the report comes out to ensure the proper functioning of this office?

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

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

I'm very happy to speak to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. It certainly is an important office in this province, and it's one that I actually discussed very recently during the three hours of Budget Estimates.

The fact is that this office has been understaffed and in dire need of help for years. It's been neglected for years, certainly by a previous administration. One of the first things I did as minister was order a review of the office after we had a very serious case that many people in the province are aware of.

Dr. Matthew Bowes has agreed to take on the report and he will be providing us with a recommendation soon. I look forward to receiving that report, and I will certainly be taking it seriously. Upon receiving those recommendations, we will take the necessary actions to ensure the office continues to perform its mandate.

Thank you.

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

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

**MS. ROGERS:** Mr. Speaker, End Homelessness St. John's, Point-In-Time Count showed at least 800 people experience homelessness in this city in a year, and at least double that across the province. The federal National Housing Strategy is committing \$2 billion towards preventing and ending homelessness.

I ask the minister: Will she commit to a specific plan to end homelessness in her promised new provincial housing strategy, and will she commit to a timeline for its release?

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

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

Everyone has a right to access safe and affordable housing in this province, Mr. Speaker. We are working alongside our federal partners to address housing and homelessness. We understand the needs of the vulnerable population.

I take this opportunity to thank groups like End Homelessness St. John's, Sheldon Pollett, Bruce Pearce and Shawn Skinner, for doing the Point-In-Time Count. I myself attended that event, Mr. Speaker, and we acknowledge the results of that event.

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

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

**MS. ROGERS:** Mr. Speaker, I'm still waiting to hear for a commitment for a plan to end homelessness.

Mr. Speaker, a shocking number of homelessness started in youth. Recommendation 46 of the All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions asks government departments to establish standards that include collaboration and evidence-based practices so programs and services are geared to young people's needs wherever they live.

I ask the minister: Will she commit to a specific plan for housing and homelessness for youth in her promised provincial housing strategy?

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

**MS. GAMBIN-WALSH:** Mr. Speaker, we are constantly reviewing our programs and our policies to ensure they are current and responsive to the needs of youth. It is in my mandate letter, Mr. Speaker.

So, yes, I do commit to the words that are in my mandate letter.

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

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

**MS. ROGERS:** Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: Because 70 per cent of homeless youth have been receiving services from child protection services, yet ended up homeless, will she commit to reinstating prevention as a key mandate in her child and youth system so that vulnerable families can receive more help so as to prevent this high incidence of youth homelessness?

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

**MS. GAMBIN-WALSH:** Mr. Speaker, we just recently conducted a legislative review of the *Children and Youth Care and Protection Act*. Mr. Speaker, under that review we will address these needs and concerns.

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

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

**MS. ROGERS:** Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister, will she re-evaluate and adapt the policies in Child Protection Services to better serve the needs of youth transitioning to early adulthood? This program is not serving their needs well.

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

**MS. GAMBIN-WALSH:** Mr. Speaker, under the review we did look at the youth service program and we will be ensuring the needs of youth are met. Under the review of the CYCP act, this will be addressed.

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

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

### Orders of the Day

#### Private Members' Day

**MR. SPEAKER:** I call on the Member for Topsail – Paradise to present his private Member's resolution.

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

I'm pleased to rise today to bring forward a private Member's resolution which has been tabled and notified in the House.

BE IT RESOLVED that this House condemn 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.

It was moved by myself, and seconded by my colleague for Cape St. Francis.

Mr. Speaker, this is an important private Member's resolution. We didn't take this lightly. As an Opposition, we get to utilize certain House of Assembly procedures to question government but also to discuss some of the decisions of government and some of the alternatives that government had to the decisions and choices they've made, because in government it is very much about choices. It's about selecting your choices and making your decisions as you govern as you lead, as you make your plans, which is a budget. You do your Speech from the Throne and your budget usually follows and then you make your decisions.

What we have in place today is a government that had promised, as an Opposition party, campaigned and promised that they would not increase taxes. In fact, we had a plan to increase taxation on HST. We were going to increase taxes, HST by 2 per cent as part of our choices to move forward, and, when doing so, made it quite clear to the people of the province the very difficult, difficult times that Newfoundland and Labrador was about to face as a province, the challenges we faced with significant reductions in oil.

In 2016, the Liberal government of the day enjoyed four times the oil production than we had in 2015. They had stronger pricing. World prices were set by, no one anywhere near or anything to do with Newfoundland and Labrador, but world prices that are set and that had significant impact and improvement for the government in 2016, one that we wrestled with in 2015.

So one of the things we were going to do was to increase the HST, but they chastised us heavily for doing so. They chastised us heavily for making the decision to do so, and even the current Finance Minister, who was in Opposition back at the time, stood here in the House on many occasions and talked about how it was the wrong thing to do to the economy.

Then a short time later, they get elected in 2015, they quickly reverse the HST and then realize: Uh-oh, we shouldn't have done that. We made a decision without having the basis or doing the research or thinking it through, and we have to reverse that. Not only did they do that, but they increased 300 fees in our province and put on, I think it was 50 new fees.

Mr. Speaker, our province went through tremendous growth back in the 2000s. From around 2005, 2006, things started to turn around, and for the decade that followed we saw significant improvement in the economy. People began to enjoy a higher level of resources and salaries, most people, than they had experienced previously. While doing so, at the same time people also had experienced a reduction in taxes.

The philosophy – and our belief was – is that the lower you make taxes, the more disposable income that people have to use and drive the

economy. So instead of taking that money and putting it directly into taxation, putting it directly into the bank account of the government, to operate government spending, it flows through the economy. Those extra taxes and fees, instead of someone writing a cheque – I know a lot of people just did their income tax; some people are probably still doing them. It's late now, but some people are probably still doing them. I heard from numerous people who said when they got through their taxes and they got to the line on the levy, they went, uh-oh, all of a sudden it's real again.

So instead of taking that money and using it in the economy, through local business, your corner store, your grocery store, your hardware store, a restaurant, a service provider, a show or entertainment or a theatre of some type, or in a mall or shopping or buying gas or buying a new car, whatever the case may be, then that money went, not through the economy and drive the economy to the benefit of government, but it went directly into the coffers of government.

Because when someone takes a certain amount of money – if I go to the corner store or if I go to the hardware store and make a purchase, I pay taxes. So a portion of that money now goes back to government, and in buying that item and paying those taxes, it also creates a job. That person pays taxes off their salary, and then that person goes out and spends their salary which creates taxes and so on.

So we firmly believe that the money people have and the more opportunity to take that money and circulate it through the economy and through the community, it creates jobs. It creates a stronger economy. It creates a better province and it drives growth, which is key.

During those years leading up to the difficult oil years of 2015, we saw a lot of that. Housing starts were booming and car sales were booming and restaurants were doing good and people were driving the economy and taxes were lower. Members opposite have criticized us for doing that.

I don't remember them every saying, back when they were in Opposition in the early days, put up taxes because they always said don't put them up, and we saw that in 2015 as I talked about.

We saw that when they were in Opposition and we were government, and we said well, the economy is moving and changing. They're challenges with oil and we have to keep the economy going.

There was another opportunity that the government had that they didn't utilize, and they could have went to Ottawa. Nova Scotia, who just announced they're going to the polls in the end of May, the campaign up there is off to a rough start for some, but they just did their balanced budget. They just did a balanced budget in Nova Scotia. They received \$1.8 billion in equalization.

Now, the Member for Bonavista stood in his place today and I think he said the deficit was going to be \$2.8 billion, I think he said this morning, was the number he used at one point; \$2.8 billion. I have no idea, Mr. Speaker, where he got that number, but nothing could be further from the truth. He talked about fear mongering and stuff and he was giving a shining example, as he was doing, and nothing could be further from the truth.

Our deficit was going to be in the \$1.8 billion range in 2015, but we knew it was important to run a deficit because we didn't want to crush the economy. We didn't want to crush the economy and bring the economy to a spiraling start by doing this knee-jerk, very quick, harsh move that cause people to panic and fear and be upset and worried and so on. All of what we've seen in the last year that happened to our economy. Everything that we saw happen in the last year.

We were running a \$1.8 billion deficit in 2015. It happens to be almost exactly the same amount of equalization that Nova Scotia gets this year and they balanced their budget. The point is, Mr. Speaker, that if we had that equalization here in Newfoundland and Labrador, we wouldn't be having all the discussions about difficulties in the economy today, we'd be still talking about, hopefully, the Liberals, instead of talking about taxes and fees and 300 news fees and taxes and stuff – if they had chosen an option to go fight for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to represent Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in Ottawa, to take the battle to the front in Ottawa – and we've seen that happen. We know in the fishery that happened when other provinces took

their battle to the front in Ottawa. They went to Ottawa saying don't give Newfoundland and Labrador its fishery fund.

I won't go down the road of the fishery today, Mr. Speaker, because this is about taxes and fees. We know other provinces fought, other provincial leaders fought for their provinces, went to Ottawa and fought for their people. Atlantic Canadian premiers went to Ottawa, went and fought for the people of their province and we never got the fund, we lost the fund. It was another example of where was our Premier and our government, and when were they going to go to Ottawa and fight for us.

Equalization was an option, Mr. Speaker. Equalization was an option and going to Ottawa and saying you need to change the rules. Now, Members opposite – the Premier has gotten up and said: Where were you in 2013? You never went to Ottawa and did anything. Not true either, Mr. Speaker. Well, I suppose it's true to a point because it was actually 2012 that the Finance minister of the day, Minister Tom Marshall, the Finance minister of the day actually went to Ottawa and entered in negotiations with Finance ministers and the federal government and presented on equalization and how equalization plans could change and so on.

We know the Members opposite have said it's in legislation. Now they said the same thing about the levy, it's in legislation. We have a bill before the House now to change the gas tax. Even though there was a new gas tax implemented last year, we now have a bill before the House this year to change the gas tax. That's what legislatures do.

Even though the government created a gas tax last year, and now they have a bill before the House this year to change that legislation from last year, that's what governments do, Mr. Speaker. They could do it on the levy and the federal government could do it on equalization, if we had someone in our province fighting for us in Ottawa.

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** If we had it. Instead, Mr. Speaker, the Liberals –



**MR. KING:** (Inaudible.)

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

I ask the Member for Bonavista to refrain from further comments; otherwise, I will sanction the Member.

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

Mr. Speaker, they had choices they could have made, choices other than hammering the people of the province with fees and taxes. They chose to increase the gas tax, probably one of the most significant ones. It impacts everybody. When I think about the gas tax I think about the person who – the last 10 years, before this government came and when we were in power, when we took over government in 2003 from the Liberals Newfoundland and Labrador had the worst level of poverty in Canada, the worst level. And the Premier of the day – Premier Williams, so we know who we are talking about – said we're going to fix that; we're going to change that. A lot of people kind of shook their heads: Well, how are you going to do that? We're going to take on poverty; we're going to take it on.

Mr. Speaker, by the time we left office in 2015 and they took over we went from the worst in Canada to the best in Canada.

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** We went from the worst level of poverty to the lowest level of poverty in Canada. And I think about the people all the time who worked hard to supply for their own families and children on their own and not have to rely on social programs. There were numerous programs, too much to get into today and I don't have time to do it here because I only have three minutes left.

Mr. Speaker, I think about those people who are trying to keep their car going so they can take their kids to school themselves, they can go to the grocery store and they don't have to rely on government providing a taxi chip for them, or they don't have to rely on someone else to do it, trying to keep their own car going.

Then they have to go and pay taxes on their insurance, they got to go pay taxes on their gas,

and they have to pay higher taxes on every repair and every other (inaudible) to keep their car going. That's that ones I think about. But they were choices, Mr. Speaker, that were made by the government.

There were several changes. There are some changes, Mr. Speaker, that are not going to be applicable until 2017. People realize this again as they did their taxes in the last couple of months, people who were doing their income taxes and filing their taxes, they saw the levy. Also there's a new increase, we know, in income tax that takes place so people haven't still haven't seen or felt the full impact of all the tax increases and fees that will occur.

On insurance, as I mentioned, there was a retail sales tax of 15 per cent put on taxes. Insurance companies as well had a 1 per cent increase on their own revenue that they – because they pay a separate revenue, and, Mr. Speaker, that's passed on to the people who own the insurance policies as well. If it costs the insurance companies more to operate because there was an increase on the taxes – people don't know; insurance companies pay a tax to the government and the tax is based on revenue, so now they increase their revenue, they pay a higher level of taxes or if their revenue stays the same they are still paying a higher level of taxes but someone has to pay for that. We know that always filters down to the consumer, to the person who needs the insurance on the car.

Mr. Speaker, we know about the gas tax and then there was always, of course, the book tax. We talked about the book tax and we saw a book tax – the only one in Canada. We are first in something, I suppose, but the only one in Canada.

But the government had choices because they talk about a healthier society and building – I fully believe in that. I try to stay active and live a balanced lifestyle and do all that kind of stuff. I know Members opposite do. Some are good runners and athletes and have great athletic pasts and so on, and some try to do that. They could have picked a sugar tax, or as some people know it, a sugary drink tax.

I know the Minister of Finance has commented in the past that it's convoluted and difficult to

tax. Well, we have a tax for cigarettes, we have a tax for beer and alcohol and we have a tax for recycling. We have lots of fees and taxes that are one-off and I don't know why they couldn't create a sugary drink tax.

I know from the studies and the evaluations and the results that I've read over the last few months – and I've seen some that have come across my desk from time to time and I've taken the time to look at them – is that they've proven beneficial for a number of reasons. It shows that there's a reduced consumption of sugar which we know is not good for healthy growth, especially for young people.

Mr. Speaker, we have more we're going to say on this this afternoon. I'm looking forward to hearing debate from the Members opposite and the Third Party. The Independent Member may speak to it as well. I look forward; we think it's an important bill because Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, of the 300 taxes and fees that were put on it last year, 299½ are still there today.

The government has done nothing to reduce the burden on Newfoundlanders and Labradorians; they've done nothing to reduce the tax burden. That's why we've raised this today. It's an important issue and it's one we're going to use our time this afternoon to debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

It's certainly always a privilege to stand in this House and speak to any legislation. It's also a privilege to speak and participate in a private Member's debate as we are today.

I will say, Mr. Speaker, that there's a certain sense – as one of my colleagues pointed out – of irony in the fact that the words in the Member's motion include the words “condemn,” “failing” and “disclosing information.” It's an ironic choice of words considering that it was the Members opposite in government that refused to release Public Accounts in advance of the

election, despite the fact that they have a requirement to do so.

As a matter of fact, we, in the last year, have updated and improved the performance of financial transparency considerably over where the former administration went. Certainly, maybe if they had disclosed to the people of the province the truth about the financial circumstances that every single person in this province finds themselves in, then maybe people of the province would have understood and been prepared for some of the difficult choices that our government had to make last year.

Madam Speaker, over the last two years and in the wake of this very serious fiscal situation facing our province, our government has taken a smart and focused approach to financial management. The magnitude of the fiscal challenge that we inherited cannot be understated. The inability and the inconsistency of the former administration to manage a financial plan left our province to deal with an unprecedented deficit, unprecedented borrowing requirements and unprecedented fiscal pressures. We were forced to make difficult decisions because of the cultivation of an unsustainable culture of spending and the results of 12 years of poor fiscal management by the former administration.

Madam Speaker, they allowed their expenses to grow some \$600 million in one year, including banking on savings that they never had a plan on how they were actually going to save that money. The Auditor General, multiple think tanks and business organizations have raised concerns about that government's spending on multiple occasions. Over the past 10 years, the previous government spent at a rate that was 20 to 26 per cent per capita higher than any other province – 20 to 26 per cent. By planning six deficits over 12 years, while unpredictable oil royalties grew, the former administration created a culture of spending in the absence of good fiscal planning.

One of the reports that were released by, for example, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, said that the PC administration overspent by about \$11 billion from 2003 to 2014. In 2014, the provincial government overspending had cost

Newfoundland and Labrador taxpayers \$1.6 billion. In 2014-15, before our government took office, our province had the highest per capita expenditures on programs in the country, at \$13,200 per person. The CFIB report from 2014 stated that the prospect of tax increases is real, but it need not have been this way if spending was held to the reasonable benchmark and population, Madam Speaker.

So we see very clearly the pattern that occurred which led to a situation that our government found itself in as we headed into *Budget 2016*; years of overspending left us with very difficult decisions to be made to secure our province's financial footing. Yes, we could have taken the easy way out and we could have ignored the situation and passed the problem onto future generations.

That's what Members opposite did, Madam Speaker, but we didn't, because our government cares too much about the province and our future to take the easy way out. What we are doing is working to fix the mistakes made by the PC government and return the province to fiscal stability. It is our government that chose to make some very difficult and responsible decisions for the long-term benefit of Newfoundland and Labrador, and these decisions began with *Budget 2016*.

We made some hard choices, and these were not easy decisions, but they were decisions that had to be made, and *Budget 2016* included measures to increase our revenue while we took the time necessary to focus on reducing expenditures. The facts are that *Budget 2016* announced modifications to approximately 300 fees, but it is important to note that approximately 240 of those fees were already on the books. From a comprehensive perspective, *Budget 2016* fee modifications resulted in an estimated increase from \$76.4 million to \$95.7 million. Across all fees, that raised \$19.3 million on an annualized basis.

Let's just put that in comparative terms for a second. *Budget 2015* fee modifications implemented by the former administration jumped from \$88.8 million to \$107.3 million on an aggregate basis. They increased fees, Madam Speaker, by approximately 21 per cent on an annual basis. That's a 4 per cent difference

between 2015-2016, yet the Opposition would have you believe this government's fee and tax increase in *Budget 2016* was completely outrageous and unfounded.

As I previously noted, Madam Speaker, there were hard decisions that had to be made that impacted the people of the province and we are not denying that. However, because this government made those decisions and have committed to a smart, focused approach to fiscal management, we have and continue to make some solid strides when it comes to this province's financial picture.

As we stated as part of *Budget 2017*, we are now on the path to gain control of our finances and strike a balance of better spending control and valuable investments. We have reduced government expenses by \$81 million last year and a further \$283 million in this budget, and we will continue to build efficiencies and to change the culture of spending. Our priority is to find balance in reducing spending while making smart and important investments in our community to help the economy thrive.

As announced in *Budget 2017*, our borrowing requirements have been reduced from \$2 billion down to \$400 million. We are currently ahead of our forecast in terms of deficit projections, and we are on track to return the province back to surplus in 2022-23.

Most recently, I am very pleased to highlight that in the report released by the C.D. Howe Institute, an organization that assesses the quality of various governments' financial information and their success or failure in achieving budgetary goals, this government scored a B grade in 2017, up from an E grade in 2016 and a D grade in 2015. The report assesses whether individuals can get valid, timely and readily understood figures for total revenue and spending in the budget each government presents at the beginning of the year and in public accounts at the end of the year.

It was noted that Newfoundland and Labrador has improved markedly, particularly with the quality and timeliness of its budget and public accounts documents. I remind the Members of this House, that it was the former administration

that refused to release public accounts in a timely manner.

Our government is continuously working to improve on how we present financial information to the people of this province. As was evident in the tabling, as I said earlier, of the public accounts last year, the earliest time that public accounts has been tabled in 18 years. The result of the report for Newfoundland and Labrador is a significant accomplishment that our government is very proud of.

Madam Speaker, as part of this path to better financial management, we want to make it clear, we are listening and we are responsive to the needs of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. In fact, a perfect example of how we are listening to the people of the province is our promised reduction in the temporary gas tax announced in *Budget 2017*. We committed to the people of the province that we would review the temporary gas tax on a regular basis, and as soon as we were able to reduce that temporary tax we would do so.

In 2017, residents of this province will benefit from two reductions in the temporary gas tax. Beginning this June, we will reduce it by 8½ cents per litre and on December 1, 2017, we will reduce it by a further 4 cents per litre, for a total reduction of 12.5 cents before HST. And we will review the remaining 4 cents as part of the 2017 fall fiscal and economic update.

Madam Speaker, that represents a 75 per cent reduction in the temporary gas tax by the end of the calendar year. This will provide residents with more disposable income, ultimately providing for a positive impact on the provincial economy.

Madam Speaker, we continue our efforts to address our fiscal situation to secure a prosperous future for all future generations. Our focus will always be on positioning our province to be an ideal place to raise a family, have a competitive work and business environment. We have established a vision for sustainability and growth in this province, but in order to achieve that we must have a solid foundation to work from, and that solid foundation is strong fiscal management.

As outlined in *The Way Forward*, this government must redefine and continue to address the economic, social and fiscal challenges. Government services must be redefined to do that, and strong fiscal management is a top priority.

Madam Speaker, as the Member of this House of Assembly who last year had to sign documents that added to the provincial debt, over \$4 billion, I can assure the people of the province that we, and our government, are doing everything we can to ensure we get our spending under control, that we are providing services in an efficient way within the confines of the tax of the envelopes of revenues we have, and we're being responsible in forecasting oil prices and oil royalties, which we've learned, and history has proven, are very cyclical revenues.

For the Members opposite to continue to avoid accountability for their role in the situation that our children in this province find themselves, our families in this province find themselves, our seniors in this province find themselves, I think is a testament to the inability of the Members opposite of understanding the full scope of the situation they left the province in under their over a decade of leadership.

I'll go back to what I opened with, Madam Speaker. The irony of this private Member's resolution, condemn, fail, disclose information, I would suggest that those words more aptly address and are targeted towards the former administration who chose to make decisions that were not in the best interest of the people of the province.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

**MADAM SPEAKER (Dempster):** The Speaker recognizes the hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

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

Indeed, it's a pleasure to get up again and represent the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis and the beautiful people in the District of Cape St. Francis.

It's very interesting listening to the Minister of Finance. I don't know if she's listening to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador but I know I am, and I know my colleagues here on this side are, and for her to talk about spending and the problems we have with our spending. When I looked at last year's budget, there was an increase in spending. That was your budget, and not compared to years before. That was your budget that you increased spending. If you had such a great thing with spending this year, you would have reduced it even more, but last year the spending in the budget was more than it was the previous year.

She talked about hard choices. I'll tell you what hard choices are. Hard choices are what the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are making today. Hard choices are what they're making today when it comes to the amount of money they have to spend. The hard choices are what were taken out of their pockets last year.

Like I said here this morning, there was \$6,000 taken out of the average household in this province – \$6,000. That's a lot of money. Do you know what, Madam Speaker? There are a lot of hard choices being made by our families, our seniors and our young people. There are a lot of hard choices being made.

What this private Member's motion here today is about, it's about all the stuff basically that was done last year, because the only difference between this budget and last year's budget is the gas tax.

Listen, any time we eliminate what it costs people in this province, I applaud it. I applaud it because people just can't afford it. I'm not sure, I could be wrong; I think we have the highest gas all across Canada. I know we do when you look at provinces here in Eastern Canada. Do you know what? That makes it hard for everybody, because that makes it hard for people who are out there doing business and they have to distribute food and distribute everything else. There's an added cost on to it, so that cost gets transferred down on to the common person that also has to pay all these fees and charges and everything else that was put in this last year.

Madam Speaker, when the minister gets up and she talks about families and seniors and

everything else, I really believe – and I really believe this right from my heart – last year they just came into government without a plan. They came into government without any idea of what they were going to do and the effects that they were going to have on the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I don't think they thought about the effects of increasing taxes on insurance. I really don't think they thought about how that affects people on fixed incomes. It affects every sort; young families, young people trying to get a start in life with a new vehicle and the extra cost and stuff like that. I don't think they had a plan. I don't think they ever looked at it.

We look at we always try to make everybody – listen, education is priority. For me, anyway, being a parent, I felt that education is a priority. As a parent, it's so important for me to do everything I can to make sure that my children have the best opportunities that they have in life. As parents, that's the way we are. We'll sacrifice what we have for our children. That's who we are, we all do it. I'm sure every Member in this House would do it.

When you look at what they're doing on this book tax, that's unbelievable. We're the only province in Canada with a book tax. I mean seriously, the best thing you can do for your children is to have them read, especially at a young age. Everyone here will agree with that.

You look at young families. I know when my kids were young we read to them all the time. All the time reading to your children because that's an important way, it opens up a lot of avenues for them. When they get to school it's a real important part of kindergarten that your children are ready to go there. So we added this extra cost to our families.

This is what we're talking about here today. We're talking about all these increases in fees. Again, when I look at education, it's simple things. It might be simple to some and maybe not.

Last year we eliminated the apprentice program. We eliminated any scholarships that a person in the apprentice program could get. A very, very simple little thing, we eliminated it. We

eliminated and reduced all the scholarships that were given to our post-secondary.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. K. PARSONS:** I let the Member get up and speak. Give me the courtesy to speak will you, please? I ask the Member for Labrador West, give me the opportunity to speak.

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

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

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

Pursuant to Standing Order 49 any noise that disrupts this House is unparliamentary and if the Speaker has to rise again, she will name Members and they will not be permitted to speak for the remainder of the afternoon.

I do remind the Member for Cape St. Francis to direct his comments to the Chair.

The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

**MR. K. PARSONS:** I understand, yes.

This is so important to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and I think all of us should have the opportunity to speak on this budget. I think we all should be up. We all get about an hour to speak and I think every Member in this House should take their full hour to explain to their constituents, and explain to people in Newfoundland how they feel about this budget.

It's important – and while I get heckled and stuff like that, I'm talking about what effects this budget is having on everyday Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, the people in this province who are concerned about it and wanting to stay in this province.

So I'm concerned about what is happening in education; I'm very concerned about what is happening in education. We came through an education system where we did some great strides in reducing the cap size in schools, reducing the size of classes and it's great because you talk to educators – I can remember going to school myself when there were 40 in

our class. Back then, I don't think we got the education, got the care, the consideration and the thought that came from our educators with 40 in the class, so it got reduced.

Last year, that changed again, it was up again so that there are larger class sizes. If you talk to some teachers and when they combined classes, that's a strain on our educators also – a huge strain on our educators.

Madam Speaker, there are a lot of things in this budget that really I have to say have an effect on individuals. If you look at the little things that we're doing, I'll give you an example. I'll just show you. There's the document that was given to us last year. There are 300 different items in this document that showed where they reduced or where they cut different things in different programs. Now, this year, we got absolutely nothing. They didn't give us anything. We're told basically to go to Estimates and have a look and see where they cut all the programs. Every day we're here in Estimates, we find out different things all the time.

I look at one little thing, and I know it's going to be small and people may think it's small, but I look at the Jumpstart Program. To me, I mentioned this morning about how recreation is important, but it's also important to people who don't have the proper money. I know minor hockey down my way, they do it. They have a little program that if a person can't afford to get into minor hockey, it could be soccer, it could be something like that, that there is some kind of a little fund for them.

Last year, cutting the Jumpstart Program – I think it was \$350,000. I wonder how many children did that eliminate from getting involved and being able to participate in the sports with their fellow students and their friends and stuff like that. These are the things we cut.

**MR. PETTEN:** Girl Guides.

**MR. K. PARSONS:** Girl Guides, you're right. There are different programs they could get involved in.

So those are the little things that we cut. Those are the things that are going to make sure

stronger and we're going to be better off and everything else because we cut stuff like that.

I want to talk today a little bit too about the fishery. In last year's, right here, there was so many things cut and every department is mentioned here, but I'm going to just find now where the fishery is and I'm going to tell you the few things – this is a very important time in our fishery. It's huge actually.

The fishery today is in crisis, according to the minister. Last year, we reduced grants for research. It was the wrong time to do it; wrong time to reduce any of these grants that we have for the fishing industry. We reduced the seafood development program. There was money taken out of that.

Now, I've been in the House for a while asking all kinds of questions and I think the minister definitely agrees with me in saying that this time in our fishery is probably the most crucial time in our history. We're trying to be able to transfer from one species to another. There are all kinds of research that needs to be done. Like, we need to do research on the effect that groundfish is having on crab and shrimp.

Last year, I told a story about how I was in and we were filleting a fish and we found eight baby crabs in the belly of a fish. We have to do research on the effect of the capelin that we're catching. Should we be catching capelin? Should we not be catching capelin? I know it's a monetary gain for our province but there are all kinds of research that we should be doing in that.

There was another program last year that got eliminated altogether. It's called the special assistance program; that's in the fishery too. What that did was a very small – I know it was small amounts of money but the program itself for harbour authorities and different things; it gave them an opportunity if they needed a pump. It was only small, little things, and I'm sure every Member who has a wharf or has people fishing in their district that they availed of this program because it cleaned things up and it made things right. It could be something with a safety issue, whether it was some buoys or whatever you needed on the wharf, from a lifeguard – whatever you needed it was

something that you could add to the wharves to make things safe and people used it.

The other one – and this really astounds me because this year I'm fearful. I don't know what's going to happen and I don't want to put any fear in our harvesters or our plant workers in our rural communities, but we need to make sure that – I listened to the manager on Fogo Island talk about the amount of work this year is going to be reduced big time. It's going to be reduced big time. He said two shifts, maybe five.

There was a reduction in the funding for the Workplace Adjustment Program. That was a program that people could avail of, to be able to get some money available so that people could get their unemployment insurance, people could go on forward and survive this year. This is going to be a very difficult year and this is the year we need to be investing in places like our rural Newfoundland, our fishery and stuff like this. It's important.

There was a reduction last year also for the Centre for Fisheries Ecosystem Research. I talked about that a little bit there a little while ago about the capelin. I believe that the capelin – I'd like to see the capelin come back because I know the cod would prefer to eat capelin rather than shrimp and crab. That would mean a big difference for anything that can improve and make sure that the reduction in crab.

I also think there should be money invested into research. I know we say, okay, all the research is going to be done by the federal government now, but I think it's wrong. I think it's wrong that we rely only on the federal government; we should be doing it ourselves. This is important. We should be doing this research ourselves. We did it with the *Celtic Explorer*. It's important that we continue.

All these things that I just named off that time, I know they were eliminated last year in the budget. They were taken out of the budget. This year there's nothing going back. There are no investments this year in any of this stuff. I asked the Minister of Fisheries, he said we're going to have 22 – I'm not sure if it was 18 or 22 researchers down in White Hills down at DFO. How many do you have now? I think we have

11. What are they doing? I'm not really sure what they're doing yet.

This is a time in our history that we need to invest. It's a time we need to invest in our people. It's time, we need to invest. Last year we cut it all out. Everybody looks at our budget last year – and we had out on the front steps of Confederation Building, they marched right up the walk, right up through the Parkway, they came in here. I can tell you the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, the 300 items that are here are still here, except for half the gas tax. They're still here.

Last year, we're very fortunate in this budget that offshore oil brought us some revenue. We're very fortunate the price of oil went up a bit. We're very fortunate that there was production, a lot of production. Four times what it was the year before. So we got a lucky break. Hopefully next year, please God next year it'll be ten times, and please God next year it's – but there are investments in our province that we need to make and we should be making, and we shouldn't reduce. They could be in education, they could be in fishery, they could be in our children, they could be in our seniors and we shouldn't be doing it.

I believe that the Minister of Finance, while she got up and she said about what a great job we've done in doing this. I don't think she understands the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and the needs of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We shouldn't be doing what we're doing to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and last year and this year is too much.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

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

I'm just going to stand for a second and I know my good friend, the Member for Cape St. Francis, I can't stand here and listen to that about the Minister of Finance. Last night, Sir, you were in Estimates. When you asked about the Fishery Fund, I told you that if you needed anything about the fishery fund for people who

were laid off from the shrimp or the crab, that if we haven't got enough in the community enhancement there is a contingency fund, which you called a slush fund, to help out the workers in Newfoundland and Labrador. That's in Hansard.

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

**MR. JOYCE:** So to stand up today and say that the Minister of Finance is not concerned and not worried about the people of rural Newfoundland and Labrador –

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

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. JOYCE:** – after I explained that to him last night. I explained it to him. We said what the Minister of Finance did in the contingency fund, which they all called a slush fund, that we used for the – I just can't stand here and let the Minister of Finance take that, because it's not true. The fund was there. The fund will be used for people who need help in this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, Madam Speaker.

I could tell you, Madam Speaker, I challenge anybody. I challenge anybody in this House of Assembly to check Hansard, and that's the answer I gave last night. The Minister of Finance, I thanked her, because she had the foresight to put that in just in case that happened. It's in Hansard, last night in Estimates in Municipal Affairs and Environment.

The Member knows that because I told him that last night, and standing up today and saying there's nothing there is absolutely, categorically false – false. Let's get that straight. Let's not talk about fear mongering about the fisheries around the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, I can tell you that.

If I'm saying anything wrong, stand up and say I didn't bring that up last night. Here's your opportunity. Stand up as a gentleman, as an hon. Member in this House of Assembly, stand up and say I did not say last night, as the minister, that we have a contingency fund. If we need money for the fishery, the money is there. Stand up and say what I said, as an hon. Member.



It can't be done. So, Minister of Finance, don't you worry. We know that fund is there to help out the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Now, I'll get back to what I was going to say.

I was back, Madam Speaker, to 2002. I'll tell you what I'm going to relate this to. I'm going to relate this to the Minister of Finance, directly to the Minister of Finance who's sitting to my right.

In 2002, we were going into an election in 2003. Everybody in the province knew it. There were cuts coming at the time. Clyde Wells was the premier at the time. I remember everybody going: Premier, we got an election –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Roger Grimes.

**MR. JOYCE:** It was 1992, it was. Sorry, 1992, Clyde Wells.

Everybody was going to him saying: We got an election in '93, you can't make these cuts. I remember going to Gillams, driving with the premier, and I said: Here's what everybody is saying, all the caucus – they're asking me because I had a good rapport with the premier. I didn't mind speaking my mind with the premier and being honest. I went to the premier and I said: Here's what people are saying – and this is what reminds me of our current Minister of Finance.

Do you know what he said to me? Eddie, he said, I'd rather lose the election with honesty than win it with dishonesty. And that's what this Minister of Finance – she's being honest with the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

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

**MR. JOYCE:** She's being totally honest to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Don't you ever think, anyone in this province, that me and her don't have our tits-for-tats coming to each other. Don't ever think we don't, we do. I can tell you one thing, don't ever question her integrity, don't ever question her commitment to get Newfoundland and Labrador back on the road. Because I can tell you, every time I hear the minister stand up and say: Here's the facts. It reminds me so much of Clyde Wells when he

said: I'd rather lose with honesty than win with dishonesty.

I give credit now to the Minister of Finance, because you remind me, every time when you stand up and fight people like me who wants more and more, and says: We can't because our grandchildren are going to have to pay for it if we do that. That's what I remember about the minister.

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

**MR. JOYCE:** Just going on, I have to put my glasses on for this because I want to read it right. The C.D. Howe financial report card, this is about the Minister of Finance now and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

“In a report by the C.D. Howe Institute this week that assesses the quality of various government's financial information and their success or failure in achieving budgetary goals, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador scored a B grade for 2017,” up from an E and up from a D in 2015, Madam Speaker. That's what C.D. Howe has said about it.

“The report looks at the relevance, accessibility, timeliness and reliability of government's financial reports across the country.” And this minister has brought us up to a B, a high level across Canada, Madam Speaker.

I know the Members opposite want to use the Minister of Finance –

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

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. JOYCE:** I know, Madam Speaker –

**MADAM SPEAKER:** The Speaker is having trouble hearing the minister. I ask people for their co-operation.

**MR. JOYCE:** I know, Madam Speaker. Some of them over there may be shouting because they heard all this last night when I told them in Estimates the same thing. They're standing up today saying they never heard it. I can understand why they're a bit bored about it because what they're saying here today, they

heard it all last night about that contingency fund for the workers and the fish plant people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Madam Speaker, I just want to talk about one – they're talking about the number of fees. How many fees were already in by the PC Party that they brought in? It's astounding. They think we brought in all these 300 fees. What a false statement to make that we brought in these fees. It's absolutely, categorically false.

Madam Speaker, I'm going to pass you on to something here now. I'm going to tell you something and the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Do you know the largest fee that the people in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador are ever going to have? You know the largest fee?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Interest payments.

**MR. JOYCE:** No. The largest fee the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are going to have: Muskrat Falls.

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

**MR. JOYCE:** Muskrat Falls. When we came in in December 2015, the Minister of Finance walked in two days later and said: Guys, here's what we have to go over and take care of Muskrat Falls because it's in a disaster. The Members opposite, four of them in the front benches who were ministers, would not deal with it. We had to take money, put it over in Nalcor just to try to save Muskrat Falls and what was happening.

I could tell you – now I'm not going to agree, I'm not going to say because I really don't want to give a lot of credit to this person, but I have to give him credit for saying this. I really don't. The Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands stood in this House of Assembly and said his colleagues on Muskrat Falls hoodwinked him. Here's a Member, give him credit, he said it. He stood up in this House of Assembly and said his four colleagues in front that are there now, the rest are still around, hoodwinked him in the Muskrat Falls.

I ask you, Madam Speaker, with the cost of the electricity going to rise, if his own caucus, his

own Cabinet, his own ministers, his own friends hoodwinked him, how are the people of Newfoundland and Labrador supposed to know what was happening with Muskrat Falls? How are we, as the Opposition, who were asking questions upon questions upon questions couldn't get it? When we go to the Members opposite they say, no, everything is good and the Members stand up and say he was hoodwinked, he was absolutely hoodwinked by his own government.

You wonder why we're in such financial straits we're in? You want to know that? When their own caucus, who sat right there in that seat, Madam Speaker, sat in that seat right there, they didn't even give him the full information of the Muskrat Falls or the state of the financial statements of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Still voted for it, though.

**MR. JOYCE:** He still voted for it. He voted for it. Didn't have a clue what he was voting for, but he voted for it. That says about something else.

Madam Speaker, I have to speak about this also. You were talking about the government. We heard today about people possibly laying off managers. Here's the former deputy premier – bloated government, that's kind of on us. That was the statement he made. Give him credit, he made the statement: bloated government. So we see how the Minister of Finance had to come in and clean up this mess.

**MR. KENT:** Point of order, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

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

**MR. KENT:** Madam Speaker, I'm sorry to interrupt the Member. I'll say quickly that I did not make that statement. It was a VOCM headline. I'd encourage him to see my full remarks. I'll have a chance to speak further shortly.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

There is no point of order.

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

**MR. JOYCE:** I understand the Member is trying to defend his actions. I understand that.

Opposition health care critic Steve Kent admits, government is too big and the former administration –

**MR. KENT:** Point of order.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. JOYCE:** – is partly to blame.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

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

**MR. KENT:** Madam Speaker, the Speaker has ruled repeatedly on using Member's names in this House of Assembly in recent days. I'd ask for the minister's co-operation and respect for the House rules.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I ask the Member to withdraw his comment.

**MR. JOYCE:** I'll withdraw. I was just reading what was on VOCM, Madam Speaker. I wasn't trying to disrespect the Chair in any way; I was just reading what was in that.

It said: "He had called to question the uncertainty created by the Liberal government's approach to tackling the provincial deficit." He, the former premier, the Member for Mount Pearl North, says "the bottom line is that government is too big ...."

Now, they're standing up on their own feet and criticizing the Minister of Finance because they're doing what they didn't have, what we call intestinal fortitude, what Newfoundlanders and Labradorians would know as the guts to tackle the problem in Newfoundland and Labrador. The Minister of Finance did.

That's where I give credit to the Minister of Finance. She's making and she's doing the actions and taking the necessary steps to put

Newfoundland and Labrador on sound footing which the government opposite just did not have the guts, the intestinal fortitude, to do. They admitted it themselves within the last several months, Madam Speaker. That's the kind of things you're talking about.

Can you imagine them, the department – the Members opposite stand up and say, well, the federal government never helped us. Here's another opportunity. I like doing this – I like saying if I make a statement in this hon. House, it's to the best of my knowledge. It's to the best of my knowledge if I ever make a statement in this House. Here's an opportunity.

Any Member opposite that its district did not get money from the Clean Water and Wastewater Fund from the federal government who came in and put in hundreds of millions in this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador to help us, stand up. Not one can stand up because when they stand up – and the Leader of the Opposition loves to make all these fantasy statements: Oh, we should be in equalization. He stood up to say the federal government never came to help us once. Not one Member will stand up because the federal government, Judy Foote and the other six MPs, came to bat for Newfoundland and Labrador, came to bat; every district opposite got funds.

**MR. KING:** They were waiting out in the rain.

**MR. JOYCE:** Madam Speaker, I have to correct something. The Member for Bonavista – they weren't out in the rain; it was minus 30 degrees when Stephen Harper kicked him out. It wasn't out in the rain.

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

**MR. JOYCE:** So let's get it straight. When they want to stand up and say the federal government is not coming to help us, it's absolutely, categorically not true. They had an opportunity to stand and say what I'm saying is not.

Talking about the equalization – and there's more to come. Phase 2 is coming next year for the water and sewer, federal government. I thank the federal government for all their help. I thank the federal government because they understand our needs with water and waste water. They

understand our need for roads in this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, Madam Speaker. They understand that and they are there with us. They're at the table.

Look at the Fisheries Fund; \$100 million we could spend now, more to come. They're saying: Oh, that's not what we had. I ask any Member: Show me the cheque that you got from Stephen Harper. Show us the cheque. Stand up and show us the cheque. They won't stand up again.

Equalization is another thing I heard the Leader of the Opposition talk about, how we wouldn't go to equalization. The last opportunity we had to go to equalization, they never showed up at the table.

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

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I ask Members, if you want to have a conversation back and forth, please take it outside the Chamber.

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

**MR. JOYCE:** Listen, I understand. I understand them being upset but I am not standing here, I refuse to stand here and let the Opposition make these false statements that were made in this House of Assembly about how we wouldn't go to equalization. Madam Speaker, I'm just not standing for it.

Now I say to the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and I say it very sincerely – I know I'm speaking on behalf of all Members here – we had to make tough decisions. I remember the President of the Bay of Islands Liberal Association, Barry Wheeler, quit. He said it was a tough budget.

The media called me outside and they said your president quit because it was a tough budget. I said he's right, it is a tough budget, but I can tell you one thing, we had to take the steps necessary – necessary – to ensure that we have financial footing. If it's not for the people around this room because a lot of us are up, it's for our kids and grandkids.

To the Minister of the Finance: I know that you took a lot of heat over this but I can tell you one thing, the statements by Clyde Wells ring a bell. Every time I hear you speak it is that I'd rather lose with honesty than win with dishonesty, which that Opposition tried to do on many occasions, Madam Speaker.

Thank you very much.

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

**MR. KENT:** Point of order, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North on a point of order.

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

I didn't want to interrupt the Member again but I am rising on a point of order. He just accused the Member for Cape St. Francis as having made false statements in this House. That's unparliamentary language, Madam Speaker. It's also not true and it's also disrespectful of the ruling that the Speaker has made in the last 24 hours. I'd respectfully ask the minister to withdraw the statement.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

**MR. JOYCE:** Thank you.

First, I suppose, I saw the order that you're going to stand on but I have no problem. What I said was the Opposition made false statements. At no time would I ever accuse –

**MR. KENT:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. JOYCE:** I'm allowed to speak to the point of order?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The Speaker has recognized the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

**MR. JOYCE:** Thank you.

I know you're upset. Just relax. I would never make an aspiration about the Member for Cape St. Francis. I would never do that. When I was talking about equalization, if I offended somebody or someone thinks I made a false statement about the Member for Cape St. Francis, here's what I'll do: I withdraw my statement. But you'll review *Hansard*; I did not mention the Member for Cape St. Francis.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

Before I recognize the hon. Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi I will say that I do not appreciate the comments that I am hearing right now challenging the Speaker. Showing partiality in this House is certainly something that is unparliamentary.

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

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

I am very happy to stand. I'm going to do something which I've done before in the House – and some people may say: Why is she doing that? I do want to point out that I do have a hearing disability and I wear hearing aids. When the House gets raucous, as it has been getting today, I really cannot function. So I'm putting that out there. I think we should acknowledge, too, that's probably true for other people in the House as well. I'm sure I'm not the only one. I think this is part of what we need to take into consideration when we stand here in the House.

I'm very happy to stand today and to speak to the private Member's motion that's been brought forward by the Member for Topsail – Paradise, as seconded by the Member for Cape St. Francis. I will be supporting this motion, this resolution, because I think it does speak a reality that we need to think about. I ask the Members of the government side of the House to think about, especially when it talks about the fact that the budget fails to nurture the conditions for economic growth across Newfoundland and Labrador.

That's what I want to speak to. It fails to nurture economic growth. There is nothing in the budget that speaks to economic growth. It's not a

budget designed for growth, it's a budget designed for stopping. It's a budget designed based on fear. It's a budget designed to get rid of a deficit that the government is afraid of, to do that with a speed that cannot be good for the people of the province and to do it at all costs.

I'm sure the government is not deliberately trying to hurt people. I'm sure they believe that what they're doing is right, that it's a way to go. I'd like to point out to government that this kind of economic planning, fiscal planning, has been proven over decades to not work.

Back in the 1960s, '70s and into the '80s, you had our two international financial bodies, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, promote a whole direction for the poorer countries in the world, what were called Third World countries, to promote programs that were called structural adjustment. What it was all about was making sure that the market got its fair share and it didn't matter that people were going to suffer in that process.

Unfortunately, that's what I see this budget to be. When the Minister of Finance says our government did not take the easy way out, I want to point out that, yes, the government did take the easy way out. It was much harder for them to deal with the fact that you have to continue delivering services, you have to continue taking care of people and you have to continue having strong social programs. You cannot stop doing that. If you stop doing that, people are going to suffer. But finding the way to do that and having the courage to take the steps to do it, that's the hard way. That's not what the government did. The government did take the easy way.

The one that we're dealing with today in the Member's resolution is the 300 fees that were laid on the backs of the people; some of them new fees, some of them increases. That was easy. Not easy for the people of the province who have to live with it, but easy for the government to do. It was simple to do. It's not simple to try to deal with: How do we make our economy grow? That's difficult and this government is not dealing with that. That's the part that's really bothersome.

This government, in 2016, put in a budget based on making money off the backs of the people of the province and on cuts. They came into 2017 saying: Oh, look, we've got an okay budget this time, but all the damage was done in 2016 because all of those things have been left in place. All of the fees that were laid on people back in 2016 have been kept in place.

In 2016, that was the plan of this government, to take money from the people of the province and to make cuts to the services in the province. That's the part that's so unacceptable, to take money away from our social programs. To take people out of the jobs who are doing the work of delivering our social programs. That's not a plan for growth.

When I look at 2017, it's just 2016 continued. They might as well, last year in 2016, have said we're doing a two-year budget and here's phase one and phase two will happen next year. We don't know what phase three is going to be when they come to 2018 because they haven't given us any plans. Their whole focus is responding to the deficit, is responding to our economic situation in the province by making it worse.

This is the thing. I invite my colleagues to study what I'm talking about because it's a fact. It has been proven because of what happened over the years with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. These things have been studied to death and the proof is there that because of that kind of direction poverty increases. It's been proven.

The economists have studied it, the economists have said without any doubt that when you bring in austerity measures the economy suffers, the economic indicators that we have in our province right now occur. Household income going down 3.2 per cent, retail sales going down 3 per cent, housing starts down 3.4 per cent, GDP down 3.8 per cent, capital investment down 9.1 per cent: that's not growth and there's nothing in the budget that's going to turn that around. That's the part that's very scary.

It would be hard for the government to start putting its mind into how can we turn this around. So, no, they're not taking the hard way out, they are taking the easy way out. They took the easy way out when they decided to, as I said,

find money but find it off the backs of the people. You look at the cuts and if you look at one of the fines or another fine here or another fine there, by themselves they may not look large, but death by a thousand cuts is what we're dealing with.

No one fee is going to bankrupt somebody, but the many fees have a cumulative effect. This is what we're hearing from people. This is why our economic indicators are going downward and the government has said that. They said last year with the 2016 budget that while unemployment, yes, we know is going to go up, the situation will be worsened because of the budget. How in the name of heavens the government could bring in a budget saying this is going to add to our unemployment I will never know. To say that's taking the hard way out, no, it isn't.

Let's look at some of the fees: The retail sales tax on insurance premiums and the insurance companies' tax which just got passed on to consumers. Insurance is essential. We are critical of people. If a house burns and people don't have insurance, you say: Gosh, how come they don't have insurance? You have an accident with somebody and the other person, it turns out they don't have insurance on their car – I wonder why they don't have their insurance.

Well, you know, in most cases – and I don't have statistics on this, but it's a general knowledge that I have and I think others would have the experience – when people don't have insurance on their houses or they don't have insurance as a tenant on the things that they own or they don't have insurance on their cars, it's not because they're stupid, it's not because they don't understand that they may need insurance someday, it's because they don't have the money to pay for insurance. So what does this government do? It puts tax on the insurance premiums – tax, so that people who might be on the edge of affording their insurance would probably have to stop getting it.

Yet, for example, if somebody is driving a car, has an accident, doesn't have insurance, then they are criminally wrong. I mean, it's wrong; you have to have insurance on your cars. For the government to say that these fines are all right, that all of these new taxes are all right, they have to know they're wrong.

Let's look at the Deficit Reduction Levy. That was so unpopular. That's what brought people to this building last year. That's what brought people demonstrating. That was the big one. The government adjusted it, they didn't get rid of it and it's still in place. People know it's still in place because every year hundreds of dollars are coming out of the pockets of middle-income families because of the levy. What's government's answer to that?

What we're hearing from people is that they are finding that the levy, in fact, takes all or a good portion of any tax rebate they may be expecting. That's not acceptable. And this is a government that says it cares about the middle class; it cares about lower income people? No, it doesn't, because if it did, it would not do that. What they're doing is going to cause greater hardship as we continue down the road.

Let's look at the fee increases for trades exams and certificates at a time when we should be encouraging young tradespeople to stay in the province. Well, that's enough to send them elsewhere. The fees are a real impediment to a young person trying to find work, who needs to pay their bills and who needs to pay rent, just to survive. Yet it is another roadblock on their way to meaningful employment and paying taxes into the Treasury. That's the other thing. What government doesn't seem to be recognizing is that part of the reason why the economy worsens with this kind –

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

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

**MS. MICHAEL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that. Then I don't have to shout.

The fact that they are taking money from people and people have less money to spend – retail sales are down, for example, because people don't have the money. What happens is the economy is becoming weakened.

The role of consumers is extremely important to our economy. So it's not just what's happening to the individual or the individuals or the families that's the issue, it's because they do not have cash to go out as often maybe to have a

meal, to go to movies, to spend their money. Our economy gets worse.

This is all logical. It's economically logical what I'm saying. This is factual as a matter of fact. I don't think we've reached the depths of what's happening in the United States and we're going to deny facts; everything that I'm saying is economically factual. Economists have shown it, economic policy shows it and for some reason this government is refusing to listen to those facts.

I know there are people – and they're obviously listening to them – who would say I'm wrong. I would say to them: What is your goal? I'm saying that to the government: What is your goal? Is your goal to satisfy the creditors? Is your goal to satisfy the corporate sector? Is your goal to take care of the market economy or is your goal as government to take care of the people of this province?

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

**MS. MICHAEL:** I say that's what our goal is and that's what their goal should be. Every single one of us who are elected in this House, that's what our goal should be. I would like to think that we all have that goal.

What I say to my colleagues on the other side of the House is you better investigate the policies that you're pursuing because if you really do care about your constituents, if you really do care about what's happening to the people of this province, then you will have to say inside of your caucus: Our policies are not taking care of the people of the province.

For that reason, we will not see economic growth. For that reason, we will see more money having to go into health care because poverty will increase. For that reason, things are just going to continue to get worse in this province, not better.

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

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair.

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

I'm always happy to stand here on behalf of the people of Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair that I represent this afternoon in the House, on a Wednesday afternoon being Private Members' Day.

We are debating a private Member's resolution that was put forward by the Opposition. It is condemning "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."

Mr. Speaker, I am dressed in black and white. As Deputy Speaker in the House, when I take that Chair, I try my best to be impartial and do my job to the best of my ability.

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

**MS. DEMPSTER:** But as the public would know, Mr. Speaker, I also am a Member on the government side and attend caucus meetings and things like that, so I'm certainly going to be speaking through that lens.

I could hardly believe when I read what the private Member's resolution was going to be today. I could hardly believe that they don't get it. Mr. Speaker, we stood here, I'm not sure what day in April the budget came down, and the Finance Minister talked about the magnitude of the fiscal challenge – the magnitude of the fiscal mess that we inherited is not easily understood. I remember her saying those words: the magnitude.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi just asked what's our view for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, what's our goal. Often, when I sit here, when I listen to debate, I compare – I use the analogy of a ship. The Member asked, what's our goal?

Well, our goal for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador – and I would think that it would be becoming quite clear to the people – is to get this ship back on course. We are only 527,000 people in this province and we

have been paying \$900 million in interest, more than the entire Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

Mr. Speaker, I spend a lot of time on the road. I spend a lot of time alone and you think about those things, you ponder them. I think just imagine what we could do with \$900 million in interest. Instead, where we found ourselves a year ago was we got elected and got onboard a ship that was going down. Yes, everybody started bailing.

Mr. Speaker, I'll admit that there were some decisions that were made that personally I might not have thought were the best decisions. I think sometimes you can hit the panic button. We were on a collision course for bankruptcy in this province.

Mr. Speaker, these people that they talk about that we're taxing, these people that are paying the fees, they're my parents, they're your parents, they're our great aunts and uncles, they're my daughter. I am a wife, I am a mother, I am a daughter and, Mr. Speaker, I think we all put our names forward because we want to make a difference in our little corner of the world.

I would like to know who among my colleagues sat around a caucus table and said: Let's tax all these people, I can't wait, let's tax them. Okay, come on, there's got to be one more, there's got to be one more. This is so much fun. Let's really create some hardship.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes the public says we're tired of the blame game, back and forth in the House of Assembly. Sometimes the people say talk about governing. I'm very confident that we are on the right track. We have report cards in place like *The Way Forward*. We've just had an update on that report card and we are certainly working together on our path to realize our potential and returning this province to surplus because as the Minister of Finance so eloquently stated earlier today: Because we care about this place that we call home. Our roots run deep and we want to stay here.

Mr. Speaker, I understand about making difficult decisions. I grew up in a very large family in coastal Labrador; my grandfather, an extremely successful businessman with a grade three



education, I might add. I come from a long line of hard workers but I grew up in a home where it was drilled in us you do not spend beyond your means. Yes, it would be nice to have this and, yes, it would be nice to have that, but you have to make choices. Oftentimes, I guess the old way was you didn't spend anything, you didn't even take out a loan; you saved until you could afford it. So I understand the tough choices.

I just want to make a comment to some of the things that I've heard over the last couple of days here. Somebody said there's a reason why we have two ears and one mouth and that's because we should listen twice as much as we speak. As I was listening yesterday, Mr. Speaker, to some of the comments, the Conception Bay East – Bell Island Member said, generally, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians save for a rainy day. The Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island talked about, generally, people in Newfoundland and Labrador save for a rainy day.

That's true. Newfoundland has known hard times. I often heard about the '30s from my grandparents. They were used to keeping everything, hoarders sometimes we call them. They were used to having to make due with little and they saved for a rainy day.

As I listened to the Member, Mr. Speaker, I thought, well, why didn't they – \$25 billion in oil money, \$25 billion in oil over 12 years, why didn't they save for a rainy day? Maybe Aunt Nellie and Uncle Joe and all of these people that they talk about they have the concern for now would not have to be enduring the hardship that they are enduring right now. It is very unfortunate.

It is very unfortunate that we have people that are having a difficult time but, Mr. Speaker, despite the difficult circumstance we found ourselves in, I'm immensely proud that we were able to find things like the low-income supplement for low-income people and seniors; \$122 million that's helping that's 155,000 households.

Mr. Speaker, I just spent 17 days in my district. I wish I had 17 more because it's big and spread out and I didn't get around everywhere I wanted. When I visited homes in Cartwright, when I

visited homes like in Black Tickle, which is often in the media, difficult times, they thanked me. People understand when you talk to them – people understand.

We have the Opposition that gets up repeatedly and talks about all of the fees and it's a terrible thing. Do you know what people said to me? We might not like everything you've done but what's our alternative? Go back to what we had? Or they know there are people in the House that will never be in Opposition or in government and they say: It must be some easy to have that kind of job because you can get up every day and you can complain about everything you can identify.

Mr. Speaker, I respect democracy in this House. I respect the lively, spirited debate. I respect that no matter who's in government, the Opposition and the Third Party have a role to play in identifying the things that are in the legislation and proposing amendments that could make it better at the end of the day so that the things that become law in Newfoundland and Labrador are the best laws possible for the people of this province.

For a Member to stand and say generally they save for a rainy day, I had to wonder why didn't they think of that the 12 years they were there. Now, despite all of the money being gone and now we're paying \$900 million a year in interest on the credit card, now they're able to stand up and say how could you do that to the people? Mr. Speaker, you've often heard the saying you cannot get blood from a turnip. These were difficult choices that had to be made.

The Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune said we were in shock from last year's budget. That's what she said yesterday: We were in shock from last year's budget. Mr. Speaker, I was in shock a lot of months too with the absolutely bad fiscal situation this province was in. Not very nice when you – I represent a district where we've been in Opposition for a long time, Opposition for 18 years. All of a sudden you have a Member in government.

There were tough choices that had to be made, Mr. Speaker. It was a tough slog, but people understand. When we go out and about and we move about in our districts, we attend events and

we talk to people, they see that this ship is turning around.

Mr. Speaker, I noticed one by one when they talk about this year's budget, they really can't find anything to talk about. They're probably just amazed with the progress that we have made one year in. The only thing they can say is it's a bit like last year; it's a bit like last year. Mr. Speaker, the people that I have talked to all over the province, they're very happy to see that we have made an effort on the gas tax and we have assured them that in the fall fiscal update that will be reviewed again.

I am so pleased, Mr. Speaker, that all of the departments are coming out with this report card. You can follow where we're going. Roads are a big issue for me. The Trans-Labrador Highway, we didn't see the progress that we should have seen over the last 12 years and the \$25 billion in oil, but we have the Department of Transportation and Works that have put it all out there for everyone to see. Here's the five-year provincial roads plan. Here are the business cases that are gone to Ottawa to be matched.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands talked about tourism and the importance of signage and things like that when you're driving down through the district. Well, I live in an area where signage isn't the biggest problem right now; we are completely crippled with broadband. I've been able to work with the Department of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation and partners like NunatuKavut and Nunacor and my federal colleagues, the wonderful bunch in ACOA, and we now have a proposal and Bell Aliant, the proponent, gone to Ottawa.

I am very confident that we are going to get the funds in partnership from the province and the feds to help the businesses prepare for tourism so that they can get online on their computer and they can check those bookings so that students can have a better speed for their Centre for Distance Learning, so that our health services people can go in and sit down in front of a screen. Mr. Speaker, you get that kind of progress when you plan, when you sit down and you analyze and you say what are the priorities and things roll out, Mr. Speaker, based on need.

Over the past two or three years we had seven by-elections. I went through districts where they were taking up good road and putting down excellent road. That's where politics came into the pavement, Mr. Speaker. I went through areas where people were being handed out things that we could only dream of in the area that I represent. Mr. Speaker, I'm so pleased to be a part of a government where we have a *Way Forward*, we have a document that we're following and the politics is took out and things are being done according to need.

So I'm not surprised to read a PMR that says oh, government put \$300 in taxes. Mr. Speaker, choices had to be made because we were in the situation that we were in. These are the same people that stand up and say oh, come clean with the people, Mr. Premier; come clean with the people on your appointments. Some of these people that are sitting there right now did 40 appointments in one day – 40 appointments. I was reading it last night in some of my literature, 40 appointments in one day, so that stuff gets a bit old. This back and forth gets a bit old in this House.

We have an honour and a privilege to serve the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We have a privilege to represent our various districts, Mr. Speaker. I will continue to do that to the best of my ability, to get to the departments and to advocate for the people who I represent, for better roads, for better broadband. I'm just so pleased that I can go to the people and say: Here is our report card. Here's what we've done in the first year. Here is our five-year plan and the ship is going to turn around and things are going to continue to get better.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know if there was anyone more outspoken on Muskrat Falls than me. I have to mention it before I sit down. It's a stone's throw from my backyard. Many times I talked about the Joint Review Panel and the PUB not being given the luxury to see if it was the least-cost benefit.

These guys are standing day after day, Mr. Speaker, talking about the hikes. That's what happens, when you have the fifth-largest megaproject in the world being developed and there was no work done to see if it was the least-cost option. Not only that, Mr. Speaker, this

megaproject started and there was no independent oversight. We called for that repeatedly.

Mr. Speaker, if that project could have been stopped when we formed government, I have every confidence that it would have been, but when you have \$6.6 billion spent or committed, when you have six major pieces being built, customized for the project in other parts of the world, when you have a billion-dollar line being built to Emera in exchange for power and you still have to provide that and you have over a billion-dollar sub-sea cable across the Strait of Bell Isle and you have a federal loan guarantee, it's not that easy to just walk out of that contract.

Mr. Speaker, I give our government credit. There were a number of measures that were taken to regain control of that project to rein in the cost and expenditure so that no more unnecessary cost would – taxpayers would not have to saddle the burden of that.

The indigenous people, I have never, never seen a better relationship with the Indigenous people when you can go into a 12-hour meeting and come out with an agreement by all parties. Later this spring, for the first time in the province's history, the Premier will lead a roundtable with the indigenous leaders; the independent expert advisory panel that's going to look at Muskrat Falls to ensure that the health and safety of our people trumps everything. These are the measures that we have been able to take despite navigating through very tough fiscal times.

We're on the right course.

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

**MS. DEMPSTER:** We'll stay the course and better days ahead.

Thank you.

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

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

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

I've listened to much of the debate this afternoon and I'd like to begin by addressing a couple of comments that were made by Members who participated. I'm glad Members are taking an active interest in the private Member's motion that is being presented today. I do think it's an important one and a timely one.

I was glad that the Minister of Finance did address the motion today. I listened to her remarks. I was surprised to hear her commentary on the spending of past governments. We definitely have a government spending problem in Newfoundland and Labrador. It's existed for decades.

All I can say is that there were steps taken in the final years of our mandate, for the time that I was at the table, to reduce government spending. That was, in fact, having an impact; but, no doubt, I've said many times, government spending is a challenge, we have to live within our means and we have to govern better. We have to govern smarter and we have to make different decisions about how taxpayers' dollars are spent.

But it is ironic to hear the Minister of Finance chastising past administrations when we just saw a government bring in a budget that increased spending. The spending increase in this year's budget is \$300 million over our last budget in 2015. So we have a government that is saying, yeah, it's tough times and we have to make tough decision – even though they haven't made any.

We have a government that repeatedly says, yeah, we have to rein things in and make tough decisions, and the people of the province have to pay a price, yet government spending has increased on their watch. So the budget is –

**MS. C. BENNETT:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. KENT:** She heckling, Mr. Speaker. She may not like the truth, but she's going to hear it.

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

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

**MS. C. BENNETT:** Mr. Speaker, I'd remind the Member opposite that we've cut spending by over almost a half a billion dollars from their forecast.

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

There's no point of order.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

**MR. KENT:** Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure the people of the province believe many of the statements that are made by the Minister of Finance or the gentleman who sits next to her who leads the government these days, for now. I understand the convention had been deferred, so we'll see what happens.

Spending is \$300 million higher this year than it was in 2015. So that shows that nothing has been solved. In fact, the problem is being made worse on their watch.

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

**MR. KENT:** Mr. Speaker, I can't hear. Oh well, I guess I'll carry on anyway.

Very disturbing comments by the Minister of Finance and I would encourage people to check the facts for themselves. We also have to point out that this government has done nothing to address the government spending challenge. In fact, the problem has been made worse because of the decisions they've made or decisions that they haven't made. The problem is worsening and nothing has been done to address it.

The Member for Humber – Bay of Islands had some animated commentary earlier and I had to rise to address a couple of remarks that he made. He referenced a VOXM article with a headline that weren't my words; they were a reporter's words. In the article I was on record as saying, yeah, government spending is a problem. Multiple governments, including one that I was part of, contributed to that problem that has been a problem in Newfoundland and Labrador for decades.

We all have to take our share of responsibility for that; however, what I went on to say is that we had an aggressive attrition plan that was

making a difference, we had introduced budgets that had in fact reduced government spending and those things had made a difference. We had a plan to get us to a much better place financially as a province and in the meantime, over numerous years, we made decisions that led to considerable economic growth that created the right climate for jobs to be created, that created the right climate for the economy to grow.

We had a plan and it was working so, yeah, I'll stand by my comments that we have to all accept our collective responsibility but now, more than ever, we need to address the government spending problem. We had a plan that was making a difference and was reducing government spending. It was abandoned by the current Minister of Finance, the current Premier and their administration and now government spending is on the rise; \$300 million over the 2015 budget, Mr. Speaker.

In the time I have left I'd like to talk about the economy and the impact that the decisions that have been made by the Liberal administration have had on the economy. We're seeing a situation now across Canada where other provinces seem to be turning the corner when it comes to the economy and we've got an economy in free fall. We were promised an economic plan that doesn't exist. Every government has an obligation to foster a climate for economic growth. Now we have a government that's forecasting further decline.

Here's what *Economy 2017* said about the year behind us on the Liberal's watch: Real GDP declined by 0.7 per cent. Capital investment is estimated to have declined by 6.4 per cent. Household income was down by 2 per cent in real terms. Consumer spending growth was down by 1.6 per cent in real terms. The number of new vehicles sold was 33,687, a year-over-year decline of 3.8 per cent. Consumer prices rose by 2.7 per cent, reflecting increases in consumer taxes as well as general underlying inflation.

Employment fell by 1.5 per cent. The unemployment rate increased 0.6 percentage points compared to the previous year. The value of provincial manufacturing shipments decreased by 15.3 per cent. Overall construction

industry employment was down 700 people, 700 jobs relative to 2015.

Housing starts decreased 17.6 per cent compared to 2015. The number of residential properties sold in the province through the Canadian Real Estate Association's Multiple Listing Service, MLS, fell by 1.4 per cent. Provincial farm receipts during the first three quarters of 2016 were down 3.5 per cent from the same period in 2015. It was not a good year on their watch.

What about the year to come? Well, we've heard about the budget forecast; we've been debating the budget in this House. Let me read some more from *The Economy 2017* forecast that talks about the Liberal plan and projections for the year to come.

2017 Expectations: Real GDP is forecast to decrease by 3.8 per cent. Capital investment is expected to decline by 7.8 per cent. Real exports are expected to decline by 2.4 per cent. Employment is expected to be down 1.9 per cent from 2016. The unemployment rate is expected to increase by 0.5 percentage points to average 13.9 per cent, what I believe is in fact the highest in the country.

Household income is expected to decline by 0.3 per cent due to lower employment. Retail sales are expected to decline by 0.2 per cent. Consumer prices are expected to increase by 2.9 per cent. The province's population is projected to decline by 0.5 per cent. Housing starts are forecast to decrease by 3.4 per cent. It's an economic crisis, Mr. Speaker, and it's happening on the watch of that Finance Minister and the government opposite.

These gloomy forecasts are backed up by others. Here's part of a release from the Conference Board of Canada in December of 2016: No End in Sight for Weak Economy in Newfoundland and Labrador.

"... Newfoundland and Labrador's economy is forecast to contract in 2017 for the fourth consecutive year by 1.4 per cent, according to The Conference Board of Canada's *Provincial Outlook: Autumn 2016*.

"Once a growth leader in Canada –

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

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

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

"Once a growth leader in Canada, Newfoundland and Labrador is facing a difficult road ahead. Improving commodity prices will not be enough to offset weakness in the domestic economy." That's from the associate director of Provincial Forecast with the Conference Board of Canada.

There are some highlights in that report as well: "Newfoundland and Labrador's economy is forecast to contract by 0.4 per cent in 2016 and decline again by 1.4 per cent in 2017.

"The unemployment rate in the province will reach an average of 17 per cent by 2019.

"With the exception of Newfoundland and Labrador, all provinces will see their economy expand next year.

"Newfoundland and Labrador's economy faces some significant challenges." There's no doubt about that, but this current government has no plan to address those challenges.

There's another more recent news release from the Conference Board of Canada that came out last month: "Non-residential business investment will fall by nearly 57 per cent in 2017 due both to weakness in manufacturing and mining sector investment and to the hand-off from an unusually high level of non-residential investment in 2016 with the import of the Hebron platform equipment.

"Labour markets will face ongoing weakness—the unemployment rate will rise above 17 per cent in 2018, and real wage and salary growth will decline, resulting in a disempowered Newfoundland and Labrador consumer.

"Fiscal austerity measures will limit government spending over the next five years ...."

The disempowered Newfoundland and Labrador consumer, that's the challenge, Mr. Speaker. This government has professed doom and gloom. They've eroded consumer confidence.

Spending has grounded to a halt. They've caused young families in this province to question their future here and some have already backed up and moved away and others are looking at doing so. Young people who had plans to come home, have now put those plans on hold indefinitely because of the climate that's been created by this government.

So our economy is now going to worsen because of the budget decisions that have been made and under the economic leadership of the Members opposite. So that is troubling news.

*The Way Forward* is a document that's heavy on platitudes. It's light on details. It's not a roadmap to growth. It's not a strategy. It makes fun of some of the strategies we had in place that made a huge difference in Newfoundland and Labrador. It's disappointing that there is no vision, no plan, no hope for the future, according to this current government.

There are lots of reasons to be hopeful, Mr. Speaker. We have huge assets in this province. What we need is leadership. What we need is an economic plan. What we need is responsible budgeting and decision making. People deserve better than what we're hearing and seeing from the government opposite.

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

**MR. KENT:** Thank you.

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

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

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

On Private Members' Day, I get an opportunity to close debate. I want to thank all the Members for participating in debate today, even though it's been a testy day here in the House of Assembly, a testy afternoon. I thank the Speakers this afternoon for trying to keep order and decorum in the House. We know that it's a very sensitive issue when we talk about budget and fees and taxes and how the people of the province feel about the budget. That's really what this is about.

The Minister of Finance spoke this afternoon about reducing expenditures and how government had to reduce expenditures. Mr. Speaker, from '15-'16 to '16-'17, my colleague for Mount Pearl North – and I think he may have confused his years when he spoke a little bit. From '15-'16 to '16-'17, the current government added \$300 million in program expenditures and they criticized us constantly for not reducing expenditures. In '17-'18, the total reduction was \$81 million. Of an \$8 billion budget, \$81 million was the total reduction.

When we've been working to try and find out the facts of the budget, we find that the pension actuarial study and the movement of the teachers' plan was about \$380 million of the savings that they claimed. Government said we had savings. It wasn't savings; it was a reduction in expenditure because of the work that we did with the teachers' plan, the Public Service Pension Plan. We moved them out of government to a joint trusteeship where both the employees and government were jointly responsible.

To move those pension plans out, some of those liabilities and the actuarial updates – and actuarial updates mean that the people, the mathematicians sit in a room and they work out the values and what's owing on pensions and so on. Because of those recent updates and studies, it was moved out of government. It wasn't a reduction that government did; it was just an expenditure that came out of their responsibility, out of their books, more or less, of \$380 million. Government has really done nothing to reduce expenditures.

They've done things to reduce revenue. We remember last year in the budget in 2016 they said we're going to have a revenue-generating budget in the spring, which was code for taxes and fees that this motion is about today. Three hundred increased taxes, 50 brand new fees in the spring of 2016 when they said don't be upset with us; don't be mad because in the fall we're going to bring forward an expenditure-reduction budget. The minister was on the record several times.

The Premier said: No, you misunderstood that. It was going to be a fiscal update; it wasn't going to be a revenue reduction. The Minister of

Finance is clearly on the record as saying in the fall of 2016 there would be an expenditure reduction, and it never happened. It wasn't to be. It never occurred. There was no expenditure reduction or budget fall – or sorry, Mr. Speaker, fall reduction.

I'm looking at the time, I see the clock is down but I think that's an error in the clock, Mr. Speaker. I apologize. They promised in the fall there would be an expenditure reduction budget and it wasn't to be. It never happened. So the government really hasn't done anything. They've lost their political will to do revenue reductions. Maybe they never had it in the first place and maybe they weren't intending to do it in the first place.

We know that government this year went through a zero-based budgeting process. We've learned through the work we've done exactly what they are referring to with a zero-based budget. What we found out was they built the budgets from the ground up. Government departments quite often have extra expenditures and they have leftover funding and so on. They move that around to meet their needs. What they've done this year is they've taken the budget and they built it from the ground up. So they've eliminated all those extra funds to move around. The Minister of Finance and the officials in Finance were quite clear and said there are no extra funds.

When we asked the Minister of Fisheries and Lands how he's going to move the office to Corner Brook, he's going to move the money around was what he said. They're going to move the money; we're going to find the money. I believe they're counting on people not going to Corner Brook. Some of the people who are affected by this that I've spoken to and spoken to some of their family members are telling me that more than they think are intending to go to Corner Brook. A lot of people believe it was strictly a political decision, not one in the best interests of the fiscal circumstances of the province. It was strictly done for political reasons only.

I've also heard that they said three months. Now that's already pushed out, I think, to July, which would be four or five months from when they first said three months. They're going to have

everything scanned and digitized and they're going to take it all and move to Corner Brook.

I heard contractors and people who have been assessing it saying it can't be done in three years. That's what I've heard. People have come in and they fold up the books in their bags, they say this can't be done in three months; this can't be done in three years. We'll see though. We'll see when the office is packed up and everything is digitized and moved to Corner Brook in three months. We'll see, Mr. Speaker.

That's the problem that people are having with the government today. They promised no new fees; 300 fees, that's what it's about. The only fee they've taken any action to reduce was the gas tax, and they haven't done that entirely. They've only done it partially.

Mr. Speaker, we try to listen very carefully over here because we hear coded messages sometimes. We're trying to read between the lines of what ministers and government say and so on. We heard a comment from the minister opposite about carbon tax. There was a comment along the way, they said: Maybe the gas tax will become the carbon tax. There was a comment to that effect, maybe there was a little bit of a discussion about it.

Are they reducing the gas tax with a plan sometime in the near future to add carbon tax on to that and the gas tax actually goes back up again but this time it's a carbon tax? Because carbon tax is a tax that people will pay in some way, shape or form. Either industry pays it and they pay the tax and the cost on to the consumers or their customers, or people pay it such as at gas pumps or when they make purchases of items that create carbon to produce, or creates carbon by using it like fuels and gas and fossil fuels and so on. We don't know that, but we expect we're going to see that at some point in time.

There was a discussion this afternoon about equalization, Mr. Speaker, and I'm going to reference it again. In 2012, there was a First Ministers' meeting. It was with late Minister Flaherty who had a First Ministers' meeting with Finance ministers. Minister Marshall was the minister of the day, the Finance Minister then. The Finance Minister went to the First

Ministers' meeting and the federal minister asked for consultation and input from the federal ministers on equalization and they were provided that.

Newfoundland and Labrador participated in that. Contrary to what Members opposite want Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to believe, the government of the day, the Minister of Finance, Tom Marshall – a man highly respected throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, still respected today. I have a tremendous amount of respect for him. He went – a fine gentleman, he absolutely is – to the First Ministers' conference representing Newfoundland and Labrador and provided input at that meeting about equalization.

In 2014, Minister Flaherty, late Minister Flaherty, announced the new equalization formula, a new equalization plan, which was essentially unchanged from what it was prior to. So to say that Newfoundland and Labrador and the PC Government of Newfoundland and Labrador didn't make efforts to change it, not so, Mr. Speaker, just not so. It's easy political gamesmanship, but I'll tell you what hasn't happened –

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** Like health transfers.

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Yes, like health – not a lot different than health transfers.

I'll tell you what has happened, is the new Liberal provincial government who brags and boasts, in the very early days all got on a plane, they went up and sat in the prime minister's office, all to celebrate their wins. They talked about what a great relationship we're going to have with the federal government. I remember the Premier saying: We love Justin Trudeau. Well good. They were sitting up in the prime minister's office. I recognized it because I sat there myself. I sat there myself with the former prime minister. I sat there fighting for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. P. DAVIS:** No, I wasn't – you know what, I wasn't successful.

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** You know what, I'll say to Members opposite. I wasn't successful in my efforts but at least I had – I almost said something then – but at least then I had the willingness, I had the courage. I had the willingness and courage to go sit in the prime minister's office and say: Newfoundlanders and Labradorians deserve more. More than what that government will do over there, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** They won't do it because they're in love with the prime minister. That's why, because they say we love the prime minister. Well, good for you, but get up there and make sure he loves us back. He should love Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** If they did that, just like Nova Scotia, and we received equalization – Nova Scotia, \$1.7 billion in equalization. The same amount that Members opposite talk about the deficit –

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

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** The same amount that Member's opposite talk about as the deficit Newfoundland and Labrador was facing – not \$2.8 billion like one Member over there tried to say; \$1.8 billion, the same amount. If Newfoundland and Labrador had that equalization funding, we'd be in a very different place, having a very different conversation today, but they won't fight for it.

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** They won't fight for it, Mr. Speaker. They wouldn't fight for the fisheries fund.

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

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Mr. Speaker, I don't know how much more – the Member over there really has thin skin today because he hadn't been able to



stop heckling all afternoon. That's fine if he wants to heckle. I'm okay with that, and I'll even stop talking and give him a chance to do so. I'm okay with that, but if he wants to heckle and disturb the House, he can go right ahead. I know he's been at it all afternoon.

He's upset about it, Mr. Speaker, because they won't fight. This government and this Premier won't fight for Newfoundland and Labrador. They won't fight for the fishery and they won't fight for equalization. That's the problem, and the problems would be different.

What they did last year in the spring – I'm going back to the spring budget, the fall budget because there were three decision points the Minister of Finance said: Revenue generation in the spring of 2016, expenditure reduction in the fall of 2016 and further expenditure reduction in the spring of 2017.

Fall '16 never happened, expenditure reduction. The spring '17, we never saw it either, Mr. Speaker. They never did it, but do you know what they did do in 2016? They told the public service, which is the biggest chunk of expenditure for government, they told the public service and put them on notice: We're reducing expenditures. People are going to lose their jobs. That's essentially what they told them. Public servants are going to lose their jobs.

So do you know what public servants started to do? They started to save their money. Instead of going to a restaurant or buying that new car or getting their car repaired or replacing the roof or putting new windows or buying a new kitchen –

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** Renovations.

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Instead of doing renovations in their home, they pocketed their money because they said we don't know.

Mr. Speaker, I am not exaggerating when I say, amongst the seven of us here in the Opposition, I would say we have heard from hundreds of public servants – hundreds, Mr. Speaker, I'm not exaggerating – who were afraid of what was going to come in the fall, and when the fall never came, that unknown moved to the spring budget of 2017, millions of dollars of economic decline because the umbrella of threat and fear

of losing their jobs over the public service now for a full year. They didn't do it. They didn't reduce the expenditure. They didn't do it.

Even the bond rating agencies that the Minister of Finance has provided the budget to – provided the budget to bond rating agencies before it was provided to the people of the province. The minister disclosed that. Before the people of the province were given the budget documents and the budget was announced, it was given to the bond rating agencies under embargo, you can't share it and so on. I think they were looking for their approval maybe. They gave it to the bond rating agencies before they gave it to the people of the province.

Even the bond rating agencies have said they've done nothing to reduce their expenditure. Nothing has changed, I think was one of the phrases that one of the bond rating agencies said – nothing has changed. I'll tell you what else has not changed, Mr. Speaker, all those fees and taxes they put on Newfoundlanders and Labradorians a year ago.

They knew this year they had to do something because they were afraid of a repeat of the outcry of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who were so hurt and so badly impacted by the budget. They had to do something so they dropped the gas tax, but only some of it.

That's why I stand here today and say of the 300 fee increases last year, today there are 299½ still in place. It's certainly not something to celebrate. I hope they fight to Ottawa.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Fear mongering.

**MR. P. DAVIS:** It's not fear mongering. I hope you fight to Ottawa. I hope you go to Ottawa.

What did I say is not right, 299 fees still in place? If anyone over there wants to say they're not in place, tell me which ones are not in place.

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

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** It's not fear mongering, it's a fact.

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

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Calling out fear mongering, Mr. Speaker, as if that's not true.

Mr. Speaker, the fact is and the truth is – and if Members opposite can show me where other taxes and fees have been reduced, they certainly haven't announced them to the people of the province and I'm sure the people would love to hear it. I'd like to hear it. I'd like to hear that noose being taken off people who are being strangled economically and are having a hard time trying to make ends meet, having a hard time to feed their families and a hard time to stay living in Newfoundland and Labrador where they want to be right here at home because of the burden being placed on them by the government.

Mr. Speaker, we will ask the government, once again, to do their job, to think about people first, to reduce the cost to live here and to improve the economy for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. That's why this motion is on the floor today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Is the House ready for the question?

All in favour of the motion?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Those against the motion?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Nay.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Division.

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

Call in the Members.

### Division

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

All those in favour of the motion, please rise.

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

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

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

Mr. Speaker, the ayes nine; the nays 26.

**MR. SPEAKER:** I declare the motion defeated.

It being Private Members' Day, this House now stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 in the afternoon.