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Speaker: Honourable Tom Osborne, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

I would like to welcome today to the Speaker's gallery Ms. Lucy Woodland and her daughter, Rhodie Anne. Ms. Woodland is the subject of a Member's statement.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Also in the Speaker's gallery today we have Petty Officer First Class Brady Power from the Royal Canadian Sea Cadet Corps 251 Southern Cross. Chief Petty Officer Power is the subject of a Member's statement today as well.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: To our public galleries today we welcome Cathy Dormody and Paul Westcott of the Canadian Society of Safety Engineers Avalon Chapter. The CSSE Avalon Chapter hosted an event earlier this afternoon in the East Block lobby to kick off the North American Occupational Safety Health Week.

There are a number of students as well in our gallery from Holy Spirit High and Villanova Junior High. These students were recognized at the event today as winners of the WorkplaceNL's 2017 Student Safety Video/Radio Ad Contest which raises awareness about workplace health and safety.

Congratulations and welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: As well in our public gallery we have Ajay Pande, Chair of the Board of the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Technology Industries. Mr. Pande is present for the reading of a Ministerial Statement.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: As well in the public gallery we have Tom and Lucy Berg, who are the

parents of one of our Pages, Carmen, and they are visiting from British Columbia.

Welcome.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: For Members' statements today we have the Members for the Districts of Bonavista, Mount Pearl – Southlands, Labrador West, St. John's East – Quidi Vidi, Harbour Main, and Cape St. Francis.

The hon. the Member for the District of Bonavista.

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am honoured to stand here today to recognize the 50th Charter Night of the Bonavista Lions Club. Celebrating their 50th anniversary on April 1, the club was officially chartered on January 15, 1967. I know first-hand of the great work that the Bonavista Lions Club does in my district, along with others in the region, just as all Members present here today can attest to the work that Lions do in their own districts.

The evening itself was a celebration of the club's storied history. Many stories were shared, many greetings brought, but the most emotional part of the evening was a candle lighting ceremony for is deceased members.

There were a number of awards presented including Lion of the Year to Anita Lane, and a lifetime membership to Lewis Fifield. The Judge Brian Stevenson award was presented to: John Keats, Alex Abbott, Bernice Clements, Laura Keel, Jackie Duffet, Doris Johnson, and Calvin White.

The Melvin Jones Fellowship was awarded to: Brenda Mouland, Michael Duffett, Marjorie Mouland, and Sharon Keel.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating the Bonavista Lions Club on their milestone anniversary. They certainly are the embodiment of their motto: We serve.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This past Wednesday evening I had the pleasure of attending the 61st annual Charter Night of the Mount Pearl Lions Club. This group of dedicated community volunteers have made a significant impact in my community.

Some of the initiatives they have initiated and/or supported include but are certainly not limited to: The annual Mount Pearl Santa Claus parade, Waterford River cleanup, the breakfast program at Mary Queen of the World school, their annual Mount Pearl youth speak-off, and significant contributions to the Mount Pearl Youth Opportunity Fund, just to name a few.

They are also contributors to the eyeglass recycling program, guide dog program and the Lion Max Simms Camp located in Central Newfoundland. Of special note at last week's banquet, Lion Sadie Simms received one of the Lions' highest honours, the Melvin Jones Fellowship, and Lion Diane Ryan was selected as Mount Pearl Lion of the Year. Also, Lion Fred Anderson received a special pin for an amazing 60 years of service to the Mount Pearl Lions Club.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in thanking these tremendous volunteers for 61 years of dedicated service to the community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for the District of Labrador West.

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to recognize Monika Rumbolt from Labrador City, one of 33 youth ambassadors from across Canada chosen to participate in Canada C3.

Canada C3 is a signature project for Canada's 150th anniversary of Confederation. The centerpiece is an epic 150-day sailing journey from Toronto to Victoria via the Northwest

Passage that will explore the four key themes of Canada 150: diversity and inclusion, reconciliation, youth engagement and the environment.

Monika, who is originally from Port Hope Simpson, is an indigenous person of NunatuKavut who has a tremendous passion for the land and its wildlife. Raised in a very traditional household, she has a great understanding of her culture and heritage, and has a firm grasp on traditional way of life.

Monika decided to embark on this journey to bring light to the economic, social and environmental issues facing Labradorians today and engage youth in shaping the future for Labrador and all of Canada.

She is a strong advocate of the Inuit proverb: "We only borrow the land from our children, it is not our right to destroy it."

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating Monika and wish her fair winds on her journey.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I am overjoyed to celebrate the 100th birthday of Lucy Woodland. Lucy Patten Hickman was born the youngest of five in Grand Bank on April 26, 1917. Her parents were Mary Anne and Charles Hickman; Charles was lost in December 1917 with the crew of the *John McCrae*.

Lucy moved to St. John's in 1936 to complete Grade 11 and summer school and then taught at one-room schools in Change Islands and Hickman's Harbour. In 1939, she went back to teach at the Salvation Army College. She returned to Grand Bank in 1941. Romance blossomed; in 1943, Lucy married Gordon Woodland, the school's principal. They had two children, Keith and Rhodie Anne, and moved to

St. John's. Lucy taught at Dawson Elementary and Reid Elementary, retiring in 1977.

She enjoys travelling adventures by both land and sea. She watches the news every night. She's an avid sports fan, especially hockey and curling. Her love of shopping has not diminished. With summer on its way and new fashions in the stores, Lucy will enjoy adding a few more items to her wardrobe. You will probably see her in the mall in the next couple of weeks.

On with the next decade!

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Harbour Main.

MS. PARSLEY: Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize an outstanding young man from my district: sixteen-year-old Brady Power of Holyrood, who has been a shining example of how hard work and dedication pays off.

Since joining the RCSCC-251 South Cross Sea Cadet Corps, Brady has gone on to excel in a number of different areas in which a cadet can participate. This past weekend, Brady was recognized in a number of different fields including perfect attendance, four-year service award, band person of the year, cadet choice and a promotion to the rank of Petty Officer First Class.

On top of all that, he also received the Lord Strathcona Medal; the highest award which can be bestowed on to a cadet who demonstrates outstanding performance in physical and military training.

Under the leadership and guidance of his officers, Brady has grown into a mentor and a leader not only to fellow cadets, but his peers as well, all the while standing for the core values of a cadet: loyalty, professionalism, mutual respect and integrity.

I ask all Members to join me in congratulating Chief Petty Officer Power on his outstanding

accomplishments and best wishes for what is sure to be a promising future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Before I recognize the hon. Member for Cape St. Francis, I'd like to recognize a constituent of his who's in the gallery today: the mayor of Flatrock, Darrin Thorne.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I rise in his hon. House today to recognize the Torbay Volunteer Fire Department for 43 years of service to the Towns of Torbay and Flatrock.

Fire Chief Mike McGrath has been with the fire hall since day one. He serves alongside of 40 dedicated volunteer members who are on call 24 hours a day. Last year alone, they responded to 248 emergency calls, punched in 2,289 firefighter training hours with great pride in perfecting and renewing their skills.

At their recent annual Torbay Volunteer Fire Department Firemen's Ball, the following members were recognized – I'd like to congratulate Firefighter of the Year, Greg Power; 5 years' service to Mark Konechny and Rodney Gouget; 10 years' service to Jimmy Auchinleck; 15 years' service to John Callahan, John Coady and Jerry Dunphy.

In October, the Torbay Volunteer Fire Department acknowledged 10 years with a satellite station in Flatrock. Again this year, the Ladies Auxiliary put off fundraisers for the department. One was a chicken dinner where they served over 500. The department appreciates their hard work.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating and thanking the brave men and women for protecting our beautiful towns.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Minister.

Statements by Ministers

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

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House to reflect on the cautious optimism I experienced last week at OTC – the annual Offshore Technology Conference in Houston. The projections are looking up for the oil and gas industry, and that feeling was echoed by the many people I met.

By working with industry partners, many of whom were part of the 100-plus member delegation from this province, and through collaboration with the Oil and Gas Industry Development Council, we are positioning Newfoundland and Labrador globally as a preferred location for oil and gas development.

While at OTC this year, I had the pleasure to meet with colleagues from Nova Scotia and Alberta and current operators including ExxonMobil and Statoil. I also met with new entrants into this province's offshore oil industry such as Hess Canada Oil & Gas and B.P. Canada, who were successful in the 2016 call for bids which had a total value of \$758 million in work commitments, as well, Mr. Speaker, I met with Total and Anadarko, who are also new entrants.

I had the opportunity to tour the Maersk Simulation and Training Facility in Houston and was impressed by the innovation, cutting edge technology and commitment to safety and quality that prevails throughout their operations. I also participated in the official signing of the agreement that will see the appointment of Alexander/Ryan Marine & Safety as distributor for Newfoundland and Labrador's own Virtual Marine's lifeboat simulator systems, which are used in Canada as well as globally.

At OTC, I met with operators and industry colleagues and shared just how vast the potential is here. Offshore Newfoundland and Labrador is considered one of the top frontier regions in the world today with over 350 leads and prospects. Through extensive geoscience, that includes seismic acquisition, we have quality data on our

offshore prospects which is attracting global attention.

Mr. Speaker, while at OTC, I had the opportunity to invite delegates to Noia's upcoming Oil and Gas Conference being held in St. John's from June 19 to 22. This offshore conference – the largest in Canada – will offer the most up-to-date information from Newfoundland and Labrador's offshore oil and gas industry and provide delegates with crucial information on trends and business opportunities.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I certainly thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement. It's certainly positive to hear of the optimism coming out of the Annual Offshore Technology Conference in Houston last week. The minister referenced new entrants into our province's offshore industry: Hess Canada Oil & Gas and B.P. Canada. I, too, and we as an Opposition certainly welcome them to the industry here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to note that the recent successful call for bids and these new entrants are a direct result of the offshore geoscience, which has been undertaken. The work, including seismic data collection, is indeed necessary and needs to continue.

However, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to point out that the industry is still waiting on the release of a generic royalty regime, which our administration announced in November of 2015. The minister said that she would release it by March 30, but still we did not have a release. This regime is needed so that industry leaders can plan their future development and production in our province. The regime has been promised and is certainly long overdue.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I, too, thank the minister for the advance copy of her statement. It's good to see the province engaged in the industry and its major trade shows. The growing optimism the minister mentioned reflects the hope that the price of oil is rising, which will benefit this province.

Good news in the short term, for sure, but this province's long-term problem is a dependence on offshore oil royalties. I remind the minister and government of the serious need for a more diversified, less oil-dependent economy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. TRIMPER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this House today to recognize May 8-14 as the 20th anniversary of North American Occupational Safety and Health Week, or NAOSH Week.

It was my honour just recently this afternoon to participate in the annual NAOSH Week flag raising ceremony organized by the local chapter of the Canadian Society of Safety Engineering here at the Confederation Building.

Every year, employees and employers across Canada, the United States and Mexico recognize this special week, which focuses on raising awareness of the importance of preventing workplace accidents and occupational illnesses.

This year's theme is Make Safety a Habit, which is an excellent reminder for everyone that we need to make health and safety a part of our everyday routine.

Mr. Speaker, a good way to establish a habit is by starting young.

I was very pleased today to see students from the Occupational Health and Safety class at Holy Spirit High at this afternoon's event, along with the winners of this year's WorkplaceNL student safety video and radio ad contests.

The winners of the radio ad contest are Megan Coles and Caitlyn Coles from Holy Spirit High.

The winners of the video ad, from Villanova Junior High, are Michael Burke, Jillian Chiarot, Samuel Collins, Nicole English, Claire Gillingham, Isabella Hayes, Ashley Howe, Jacob Kavanagh, Jefta Merkuratsuk, Justin Oake, Jessica Olford, Eli Paulin and Daniel Scott.

I do commend these students for their commitment to making safety a habit, and I encourage everyone to follow their example.

By working together, government, employers and employees can ensure that everyone returns home from work, healthy and safe, every day.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I want to thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. Mr. Speaker, we are pleased to recognize North America Occupational Safety and Health Week. I want to thank the organizers for today's event. It was great to see so many young people there this afternoon, along with representatives from various safety organizations and industry.

Mr. Speaker, just over a week ago we also recognized National Day of Mourning. Both of these events highlight the importance of workplace safety and remind us all that health and safety of individuals must be a priority in the workplace and also at home and in our individual lives.

I also want to congratulate the winners of the student safety video and radio contest. Make

Safety a Habit is a great theme. We should make every effort to ensure that at the end of the day everyone comes home safe.

Thank you very much.

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. It is important to educate young people and others on occupational health and safety. But I want to remind the minister that one of the more serious provincial OHS issues continues to be night flights to offshore platforms.

With the Hebron GBS poised to be towed out to the oil fields and more exploration in deepwater, this will soon be an issue again. I urge the minister to ensure government takes a clear stand against this dangerous practice.

Thank you.

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to recognize our province's annual Innovation Week, led by the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Technology Industries, NATI.

Over the next five days, numerous partner organizations will roll out over 20 unique innovation-related events, bringing together start-ups, youth, business and public partners in an effort to collaborate and learn from global innovators about how to infuse innovation into their businesses and communities.

We cannot downplay the significance of the technology sector in Newfoundland and Labrador. According to the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Technology Industries there are over 170 companies in the sector, over 4,000 employees and over \$1.6 billion in annual revenues.

It is obvious innovation has a remarkable influence on our province's social and economic development. As outlined in *The Way Forward*, we are committed to resetting the innovation agenda in Newfoundland and Labrador as a way to help strengthen and diversify our economy, and to create an ecosystem with innovation that can flourish.

Already there has been an extraordinary level of industry interest, public participation and community awareness in the development of our new Business Innovation Agenda. I am proud to say that we are on track to launch this new agenda in the coming months.

Another key initiative is our Regional Innovation Systems Pilot Project. As part of Phase Two, regions throughout the province have been selected based on clusters of businesses active in sectors of fisheries and tourism; forestry and agrifoods; aerospace and defence; industrial technology development; and ocean technology. This new system will help drive our regional economies to build a competitive advantage by diversifying unique, localized knowledge into new innovations.

As we continue to work towards advancing business innovation, productivity and competitiveness, as well as increasing research and development, we recognize the importance of working with our industry partners. It is through a collaborative effort that allows us to align this energy, ultimately producing a province that is more prosperous for all of us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. I want to begin by recognizing provincial Innovation Week 2017. I, too, want to commend businesses and individuals throughout all sectors of this province whose efforts bring about growth and development in our economy.

Newfoundland and Labrador is the birthplace of some of the world's best innovators and entrepreneurs. Up until recently, our province had become synonymous with growth and opportunity in many sectors. I commend those in our tech sector and those participating in Innovation Week, not just for their ingenuity, but most notably for their resilience.

The minister has stated that the Liberal government plans to reset their innovation agenda. This is ironic considering that two consecutive Liberal budgets have smothered the Newfoundland and Labrador economy and built barriers to innovation. I have the utmost faith in the entrepreneurial minds that are on display during Innovation Week, and their successes in spite of the barriers built before them is a true testament to their talent and their ability.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. 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. It's interesting to hear government is resetting the innovation agenda. I would like to have heard more details about the innovation agenda, not just generalities. The concept of regional clusters of businesses is a good one, but what is government actually going to do to assist in developing ideas and accessing capital for new innovative business and employment in the regions.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Speaker, the former appointed Liberal clerk signed off on orders-in-council which transferred contingency funds to the Department of Justice to settle legal files.

I ask the Premier if he can state unequivocally and without reservation that Mr. Coffey hasn't signed off on any funds for settlements that he may have had a conflict of interest in.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

I'm certainly happy to stand here as it relates to anything to do with the Department of Justice and Public Safety. Certainly, I'm willing to double-check and verify what the Member opposite is saying. But I'm fairly confident that, no, Mr. Coffey would not have signed anything to do of that nature.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I look forward to confirmation of that from the minister and appreciate his answer.

Mr. Speaker, the former Liberal clerk is not permitted to engage in legal cases involving the government or any government agency for a 12-month period following resignation.

I ask the Premier: What action has he taken to ensure that Mr. Coffey respects this 12-month, cooling-off period?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is the exact question that the Member opposite asked last week. I'll answer the question the same way, Mr. Speaker.

As you know, there are regulations, there are guidelines on any activity that anyone that would work within the executive, or any politician I would say, too, Mr. Speaker, once they leave the elected office or once you leave a position like the former clerk did last week. Those rules apply to everyone as they would apply to Mr. Coffey.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

The question was what action has the Premier taken to ensure that Mr. Coffey respects it, but he hasn't provided that answer. He didn't last week and he hasn't provided it this week.

I ask the Premier if he, Cabinet or government have taken any action to waive that 12-month, cooling-off period.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

No, we haven't, but I can tell you that when you look back at the history of the Member opposite – and we all know what's happening with the PC Party right now. We're getting a few people that are showing some interest in the leadership campaign again. Someone is really trying to score some political points, Mr. Speaker.

We've seen the actions, Mr. Speaker, around Humber Valley Paving that was made really the night before, the day before when we saw cancelling of contracts and bonds that were released to make way for someone who, at that point, the night before at least, wanted to be the Leader of the PC Party. We've seen Len Simms move from a deputy minister-equivalent position to run PC campaigns. That was okay.

Mr. Speaker, this is a clear – what this is, is just clear double standard for the PC Party and the way government exists today. This is the way it is. There's a PC standard and the standard that's set for everyone else. It's clearly what this is all about.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I say to this hon. House quite sincerely, that this is a matter of great importance to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. P. DAVIS: I also have to say I find it somewhat disrespectful for the Premier to use his time, instead of answering questions about this important matter, to use it for political grandstanding.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. P. DAVIS: I also remind the House, that we went through three days in Question Period last week –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member for Torngat Mountains that I've recognized the Leader of the Opposition to speak.

The hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

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

We went through three days of Question Period last week before we found out there was an additional file. So do we have more questions? We absolutely do, Mr. Speaker, and we'll be asking them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. P. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Natural Resources, when did she find out that

the former clerk was continuing to practice law on the side while he had filed a claim against Nalcor?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Before the minister gets up and answers the question, because I'm sure it will come again. I just want to be very clear. I want to be very clear, Mr. Speaker, when the Member opposite gets into a preamble and misleads the people of this province, we will stand up and we will push back and we will remind the –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: – people of this province of a double standard that that PC Party had for many years. We will constantly, because it was the Leader of the Opposition, his own words last week that said we shouldn't forget the past.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: We will not forget the past, Mr. Speaker. It's been a double standard. There were no additional files last week. We started very clearly answering the questions about the seven files that were discussed with Cabinet Secretariat, with Justice and myself. Mr. Speaker, nothing new was added.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

This is coming from a Premier who campaigned on openness, transparency and ethical operations, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, yes, I will ask the Minister of Natural Resources again: When did you find out that the clerk was practicing law on the side – because not many over there knew about it – while he was also suing Nalcor?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I learned of the statement of claim filed on behalf of a former employee of Nalcor last week in the media.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Well, I say to the minister, this must have come of some concern to you.

When you found this out, what actions or steps did you take when you found out about this conflict of interest that you weren't made aware of?

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

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, open transparency and ethical accountability is what this government stands for.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. COADY: I did ask my deputy minister if he was made aware, if there was anything there that I should be made aware of and there was not, Mr. Speaker, and that was the action that I took and I followed it closely.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Through all the bits and pieces of information that we've been able to extract from government, one that we found out was that the clerk did talk to the Deputy Minister of Natural Resources.

Do you have any concern that the deputy minister hadn't shared that with you?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If the Member opposite is aware of information, I did speak with my deputy minister, Mr. Speaker, and he advised me that he was not aware that a statement of claim would have been filed on behalf of a former employee which preserves, for example, the rights of that employee. It doesn't necessarily mean that Nalcor will be served.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'll ask the minister if Nalcor addressed or brought any concerns to her attention regarding this conflict of interest.

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

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, the Member opposite keeps referring to a conflict of interest. The statement, I understand, has not yet been served to Nalcor. That's what my understanding is.

Nalcor has not brought it to my attention. They have not yet been served. It is preserving the right of the former employee, which is their right to do so, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Well, I ask the minister, Minister of the Crown: When the clerk of Executive Council files a claim against an agency that she's responsible for, does she not see that as a conflict of interest?

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

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

I'm certainly happy to stand here and speak to this again. I think it's been made abundantly clear what happened in this case. Certainly, there was a statement of claim filed on behalf of the client. This was done in contravention of the contract. The matter was referred to the Premier's office, and the fact is that Mr. Coffey has now resigned. He's tendered his resignation. So I'm unaware as to – if there's any further information, we're certainly not aware of any. We think that this matter has been dealt with, unfortunately, as it has been.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

That's two questions I've asked the minister that others have gotten up to answer. So I'll ask her again. She's the Minister of the Crown responsible for Nalcor. The clerk was practicing law privately and had a lawsuit against Nalcor.

My question to the Minister of Natural Resources: Does she believe that constitutes a conflict of interest?

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

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

I'm certainly happy to stand here and speak to the statement of claim which was filed with the Supreme Court of Newfoundland and Labrador, but certainly has not been served on Nalcor.

One can talk to Mr. Coffey about that. From what I understand, I'm not even sure if he's representing the person further and we wouldn't be aware of this. Right now, the matter has not even been served on Nalcor.

The Member opposite keeps talking about a conflict of interest, but I would remind him that I think there have been decisions made in the past about premier's at the time asking for outside lawyers to be hired to sue government. Perhaps we can continue to talk about that matter further.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: In Estimates, officials confirmed that inclusion grants will be reduced by \$25,000 in *Budget 2017*.

I ask the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development: How many people will be impacted by this further cut?

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

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Speaker, what I can say is the overall decrease will not significantly affect our capacity to deliver the initiatives. It is an application-based process. I said that in Estimates, I will say it again here today. I cannot predict who is going to apply for the program.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: Officials also confirmed that capacity-building grants will be reduced by \$25,000 in *Budget 2017*.

I ask the minister: When will groups be informed that their funding may be cut with the budget reduction?

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

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what part of application-based driven the Member does not understand but it is based on applications that we receive. We will continue to deliver the initiatives.

In actual fact, Mr. Speaker, there's still \$400,000 left in that fund. There is funding in the fund to deliver on initiatives that we anticipate we will receive but they're application-based.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: A cut of \$50,000 in disability funding would equal the cost of a free long weekend at Marble Mountain.

When will the minister notify the disabilities groups of the cuts to the funding program?

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

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: I'm not sure that's the right math, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, application-based. The community organizations apply for the initiatives; we fund them – application-based.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: These grants are indeed application-based. They were cut in Budget '16 from \$600,000 down to \$450,000 and now cut again to \$400,000. This money goes to individuals to make their vehicles accessible, to organizations to make their buildings accessible. This funding is needed.

How many applications were turned down last year as a result of your cuts?

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

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member opposite for the question.

In actual fact, Mr. Speaker, when I became Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development, what we noticed is that the previous administration was making individuals reapply over and over and over.

So, Mr. Speaker, the same individual probably applied in year one, applied in year two and would have to apply again; red tape. I said enough of this. We need to address the concerns of the individuals who need the accessible transportation. We address the wait-list and then we reopen the application process.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: As the former director of the Association for Community Living, why would the minister choose to slash the funding for such groups and services when some of our hon. colleagues have stood up for their constituents?

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

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Speaker, the Member opposite is fear mongering. Four hundred thousand dollars is available to non-profit organizations to apply on these grants.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The elimination of the antiquated IQ 70 testing was committed to by the Liberal government in their 2015 campaign platform; however, a year and a half into their term, we have heard nothing.

I ask the Minister of Education: What specifically has been done to date?

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

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We're committed to serving the people of the province. We have committed to providing a comprehensive strategy when it comes to individuals with autism spectrum disorder.

We know that the Autism Society is still struggling with the 13 per cent cut to its core funding that the previous administration made to their budget in 2013. Day after day after day, we are being petitioned to help with their situation because of the core funding cut that was made by the previous administration.

There's also a very difficult fundraising environment, as they have alluded to, because of the downturn in oil. There are very significant challenges for persons with autism spectrum disorder today, but we're committed to the strategy that we've said we will implement.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, in a time of teacher reductions, cuts to inclusive learning and slashing resources, the government seems quite comfortable to sit on their hands and ignore the immediate needs being voiced by the autism community and others.

When can we expect this to be done and what time frame will the minister commit to?

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, as we said prior to the budget, there are no changes to the teacher allocation formula, so there are no cuts in teachers. In fact, I understand that the English School District is preparing an advertisement for some 500 positions across the province for teachers.

We are spending approximately \$120 million a year on inclusive education initiatives at the moment. That includes additional teaching positions that we put into the system last year and \$1 million worth of additional student assistant time. I would argue quite a bit has been done to restore the damage that the previous administration did to the education system in this province.

I find it extremely ironic that the Member rises here in the House on this after they cut the

Autism Society's funding by 13 per cent in 2013.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: The minister neglects to note that the 500 teachers being now advertised are nowhere close to the 700 with the 200 cut from last year.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Also, it was this administration who had a great working relationship with the Autism Society and did indeed increase their funding for many years.

The minister stated that job cuts would not come from his college review, but last Friday there were job losses announced at CNA.

Why was the minister not upfront with the staff from the beginning?

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

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

Of course, college enrolment is very important in determining what the staffing complement should be. I would like to point out to the hon. Member, I think he is already aware of this, there are 9,000 students enrolled annually across 17 campuses at CNA. There are approximately 1,250 employees, including 700 faculty. The College of the North Atlantic offers 95 unique academic programs and these 95 academic programs are offered – 210 of which are program offerings or classes throughout those 17 campuses.

Today, we know that seven of those classes or program offerings – of the 210, seven have enrolment of less than combined 40 students. As a result, there had to be a reconsideration of some of our staffing. This is not a function of the modernization plan, this is an annual event that the hon. Members opposite did when they were in government as well.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: I thank the minister for outlining the valued work that CNA does and the improvements and the necessity for the programs in this province.

The minister knew as of April 28 that these job losses would happen but decided to keep it a secret. How many more cuts will come through the college system in the near future?

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

MR. BYRNE: Well, Mr. Speaker, the information was conveyed by the College of the North Atlantic just recently, conveyed to its staff, and there are still decisions and information that has to be conveyed to affected staff. What I do know is what I do know, which is that in 2013 that administration cut four of the complement of programs within the College of the North Atlantic.

There were 167 employees that were let go that year, including 131 faculty members. ABE was cut, the emergency management diploma was cut, the nutrition and food services management program was cut and the adventure tourism program was cut. Enrolment at the College of the North Atlantic in 2013 was cut or reduced by 1,158 students.

No, Mr. Speaker, this is not that.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: The minister's and that government's process here for making decisions is based on what somebody else did in the past. I think you need to govern based on the needs of the students, particularly right now.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: Is the minister using an enrolment benchmark for all the college programs or he's just cutting at random?

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

MR. BYRNE: No, Mr. Speaker, I would take absolutely no advice from that crowd opposite as to how CNA should conduct its affairs.

What I do know is this: Of the 210 different classes that were offered in the 17 campuses throughout the province, there were seven classes for which the total requested enrolment by students measured less than 40 students. It would be the responsible thing – given that those classes or those programs would be offered in other campuses – rather than to have classes offered at CNA with four or less students in some circumstances, ask the students to consider going to a different campus.

Forty students were impacted and quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, that is the responsible behaviour to take.

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last Monday in Estimates the minister said of the Ernst & Young library report and I quote: I don't have any visibility in this report. It's provided to the library board, not to the department. But in a recent access to information, the department admitted it does have the report and chose to withhold it from the public.

Minister, does your department have the report or not?

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, as I told the Member in Estimates, I don't have any visibility

in the report. I'm not reviewing the report; I'm not approving the report.

There was an access to information request filed in accordance with the legislation that those Members brought into the House of Assembly. I expect that they should at least understand their own legislation that incomplete draft reports are not released, and there is a period under which agencies, boards, commissions and departments are permitted to allow for the finalization of the report.

The provincial libraries board has now finalized their report. When they release it to the public the Member will get it and I will get it.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: I'm glad the minister noted that because that's exactly what he quoted. He said: I will get it when the media gets it. But now he's admitting that they have a draft report.

Have you or any of your officials reviewed the draft report, particularly as you're the minister responsible for education in this province which the library boards fall under?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to be lectured by the minister who bought a ferry and forgot to buy the wharf to go with it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: As per their legislation which he seems to forget, the deputy minister, who is the permanent head of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, received a draft report and responded to this access to information request. He said in the access to information response that the report was incomplete or in draft form and basically wasn't

going to release it in accordance with the legislation.

I have not seen the report; I've requested not to see the report. I will see it when he sees it and the media sees it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, this is the minister who instructed library boards to make the cuts by taking away their money, then when there was an upheaval by the general public, decided we'll do a review of it but said the review will be hands off. Yet, they designed it; his staff were part and parcel of every one of the consultations. Now he has the draft copy of the report but he does not want to respond to it.

Mr. Speaker, I do ask: When will the report be released?

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, the report will be released when it is finalized. That's what I told the Member in Estimates. In fact, that's what I've told the Member for close to a year now.

I understand that the provincial libraries board has finalized the report. When they release it to the public, I will see it for the first time, the same as he will see it for the first time.

The Members stood in their place time and time and time again last spring through the media demanding a review, that this decision be reversed and so on. We have done everything we can to respond to the public, to respond to public concern, to respond to the concern that the Opposition has raised here in the House of Assembly, but once again that's not satisfactory to them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, the same minister last year, during a scrum with reporters, stated he was not comfortable with the library decision, and later in the fall stated he had to appoint and change the closure of the libraries.

If the minister speaks with integrity, can he confirm that the 54 libraries have no issue and they will continue to operate in Newfoundland and Labrador? It's a simple question.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what I can add that's new to this conversation. These are the same questions, just regurgitated and recycled. The Member should get an award. If there's an award for asking the same questions over and over again and expecting a different response, then he should get a medal for that.

The funding for the public library system has been reinstated in this year's budget. The Member spent months talking about the library closures when not a single library in Newfoundland and Labrador has closed as a result of any decision of this government.

There has been a review which was asked for by the libraries board which was demanded by the Opposition. When the report comes out, further decisions will be made by the libraries board. If they make decisions around new libraries or library closures, they will make those recommendations to the department and we will deal with them then.

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 House sat for only two days following the budget and closed early for Easter. Last week, political appointments dominated the House but today we're turning back to the budget.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. MICHAEL: In 2015 the Liberal platform projected improved revenue from economic diversification in the amount of \$79 million in 2017. I couldn't find a reference to this in the recent budget documents.

I ask the Premier: How much is budgeted for improved revenue from economic diversification this year?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When you look at the budget of 2016 or 2017-2018, Mr. Speaker, and *The Way Forward: A vision for sustainability and growth in Newfoundland and Labrador* that we announced last November, very soon you will see an update again with *The Way Forward*.

We know for many years – and it's been mentioned quite often in this House or for many months, I would say, about what we inherited last year. It was a very difficult time, Mr. Speaker. Some difficult choices had to be made and I would say that responsible to some degree they were difficult for all of us on this side of the House of Assembly.

First and foremost, we had to get the financial house in order for this province, Mr. Speaker. Institution after institution has given the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board, as well as this whole caucus, credit for the work that's been done this year. There's been a list of them. We know we have to diversify this economy.

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.

Friday's announcement was bad news for 45 College of the North Atlantic employees and their communities.

I ask the Minister of Finance to give us the total number of public service jobs eliminated because of this year's budget.

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

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

As was discussed with public sector union leaders just prior to the budget, this year's budget did not have an announcement, nor does it contain an announcement about large-scale layoffs or position eliminations as was seen in the budget that we did last year. What we communicated to labour leaders and we've communicated to the people of the province and we've communicated to this House and we continue to communicate, that when there are minor, small adjustments that must be made in the normal day-to-day operational decisions that needed to be inside government or its ABCs we will make those, and the decision that CNA announced this past week was reflective of just that.

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.

A job loss is a job loss, no matter when it's announced, and jobs lost cover not just unionized workers, but also management. We're hearing in Estimates day after day of positions that are gone from government.

I ask the minister: Why is she refusing to disclose the number of public sector job losses?

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

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

For the Member opposite, certainly I think everyone in this House is cognizant of the challenges that individuals who are impacted by job changes and job losses go through. I don't think there's anybody in this House, Mr. Speaker, that isn't empathetic.

For the Member opposite, I would suggest that when we talk about salary elimination in a budget line, I think it would also be responsible for her to also acknowledge that there have been, in the past, due to poor administrative oversight by the former administration, budgets that have grown beyond what is required, and not just budgets that impact people, but salary lines that have increased.

Mr. Speaker, we'll continue to look for savings and budget reductions that we can make that don't impact people.

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 ask the minister: What proportion of the job losses from the college are in rural Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

MR. BYRNE: Mr. Speaker, the College of the North Atlantic's footprint is heavily vested in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. What is undeniable is it provides a tremendous strength to rural Newfoundland and Labrador, but when there are classes of the 210 program offerings, seven had enrolments of either no or very, very few students.

It's the responsible thing to do to ask the 40 of the 9,000 students that are enrolled at the College of the North Atlantic annually, for those 40 students that were applied to participate in classes in certain locations, those classes being offered in other campuses with higher enrolments; the responsible thing to do for the college, for the students and for the community is to address that front on and to offer those classes, but most importantly, bring in a modernization plan for CNA, which we did.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Budget 2017 is basically a continuation of last year's harsh measures.

I ask the Minister of Finance: Why are we still the only province with a provincial sales tax on books? It's a shame, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, as people of the province have found themselves and this government found themselves, last year we were faced with some very difficult and challenging circumstances. There were a series of measures that were undertaken to help, as the Premier has already indicated, to ensure that we had a strong financial footing for the Treasury to be able to go forward and do the things we need to do like diversifying the economy.

Mr. Speaker, the book rebate was a program that cost taxpayers' of the province an amount of money. The decision was made last year to eliminate the rebate. It will be reviewed as part of the tax later on this year.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

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

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

Under the authority of subsection 4(5) of the *Supply Act 2016*, I will be tabling an order in council which authorizes the transfer of funds from the contingency reserve to the Department

of Justice and Public Safety for the settlement of a litigation file.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

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

MR. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move the following private Member's motion, seconded by the Member for Stephenville – Port au Port:

WHEREAS Newfoundland and Labrador has a spectacular range of biodiversity in need of protection; and

WHEREAS just 4.6 per cent of our province's land mass is currently protected which is just half the overall Canadian average; and

WHEREAS a well-governed, scientifically based system for designating protected areas has the potential to benefit our environment, our economy and our research endeavours;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House supports the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador designating more protected areas in our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

Pursuant to Standing Order 63(3), the private Member's resolution that was just read will be the one that's debated this Wednesday.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

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

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

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

WHEREAS an increase in the tax on books will reduce book sales to the detriment of local book stores, publishers and authors, and the amount collected by government must be weighed against the loss and economic activity caused by higher book prices; and

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

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

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government not to impose a Provincial Sales Tax on books.

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

I would like to read this particular line again: WHEREAS this province has many nationally and internationally known storytellers, but we will be the only people in Canada who will have

to pay our provincial government a tax to read the books of our own writers. Imagine, Mr. Speaker.

Last week, I asked the question: Has government put in place any measurements or any analysis or any process of analysis to look at the effects of the budget cuts or the extra fees or taxes that government has imposed on their last two budgets? And I have no answer of course. I'm wondering – and, again, government must take a look and see have our budgets been successful and what is that measure of success.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot imagine how in any shape this government can look at this tax and say that it has been successful. How could you possibly measure success by taxing books and being the only province in the country where our citizens have to actually pay a tax to read a book? Where is the success in that with the province with the lowest literacy rates?

When we also look at the high rate of debt that many of our post-secondary education students finish their education, this only adds to it, Mr. Speaker. I don't know how they can possibly say that this is successful. There can't be any measure that would say that this is a successful tax.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

WHEREAS this lack of services is having a significant impact on both students and teachers; and

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

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

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

Mr. Speaker, this is an issue that's been discussed at length in the House of Assembly and certainly by the All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions, which concluded its work earlier this year after two years of work. I know the education critic for the Official Opposition has raised this issue as well.

I'm pleased to say that in the All-Party Committee's recommendations we addressed this very issue that I know people are concerned about and rightly so. We recognize that there needs to be a real coordination of services between the education system and between the health system. The links have to be direct. There have to be multidisciplinary teams that are available to support our guidance counsellors and to support our teachers in helping young people who are dealing with any kind of mental health issue or any kind of mental illness.

As the petition says, left unchecked matters can develop into more serious issues. We have many young people, very young students in our schools who are dealing with stress, anxiety and depression, but often more serious forms of mental illness as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. KENT: Thank you for your protection, Mr. Speaker.

I know that there have been some good programs put in place. There have been some improvements made but there are still some major gaps when it comes to providing mental

health services to our students. Early identification, early intervention and prevention are so key.

We can save potentially hundreds of millions of dollars down the road by investing more in providing mental health services to young people. We have a captive audience in the school system. That's where we need to reach them.

The health system needs to work collaboratively with the education system and make more resources available through interdisciplinary teams that can provide the services that are needed. That could be counsellors. That could be social workers. That could be physiologists. That should be psychiatrists. There are a number of health professionals who would be involved in these teams, depending on the needs of the individual children and the individual families.

I know there are recommendations in the All-Party Committee report. I know government is committed to acting on them and we'll continue to hold government to account to do just that.

Thank you.

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

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

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the

House of Assembly to urge government to immediately cancel this ill-conceived book tax.

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

Mr. Speaker, I won't belabour this point long today because this petition has been brought up numerous times, but it's every bit as important today as it has been every other time because this tax is still there. It does affect our literacy rates.

If you're adding a tax onto – you're purchasing a book and that added tax does have an effect, any additional cost on any product we buy does affect consumers whether they buy it or not. It's sad that you have to put dollars and cents ahead of buying books.

It's a part of learning; it's a part of literacy. It's a very important part of everyone's lives, especially our children's. Reading is meant to be something we encourage and this tax is actually – it's not an incentive, it's an impediment to what should be something we take for granted.

We're the only province in the country to have a book tax. That tells you everything you need to know. The rest of the provinces don't have this tax, we do. The only reason is a revenue generator, which is questionable what you're getting from revenue because the sales obviously are dipping as a result of this.

It's something that we do call upon government to reconsider. It does affect literacy rates and we strongly recommend them to reconsider it.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Speaker, we all recognize that there are challenges, but in times of challenge the important thing to do is to prioritize your decisions and make decisions that are in the best interests of the people as a whole.

When we look and see decisions being made like cuts to youth organizations and cuts to groups with disabilities, while at the same time we see \$50,000 being spent on one day of consultations for *The Way Forward* or nearly \$50,000 on opening Marble Mountain for a free ski weekend, then we really have to question the priorities of this government and the decisions they are making. In our view, we certainly feel that the youth in particular are the future. Of all the funding that does go forward by government, youth, seniors and persons with disabilities and challenges should certainly be a priority.

We call upon this government to revisit their decision making and to prioritize the people of the province, not political gain for their party.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Thank you.

Orders of the Day, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

MR. A. PARSONS: I call from the Order Paper, Motion 3, the Concurrence Motion regarding the Social Services Committee.

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure for me to stand in the House today and talk with regard to our budget. I certainly look forward to further opportunity to speak as well.

Mr. Speaker, before I get into some of the discussions with regard to some of the positive things out of the budget, I just want to make reference to this past weekend when myself, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment, as well as the parliamentary secretary to Municipal Affairs, attended the MNL Symposium in Gander.

Mr. Speaker, at that symposium there were a record number of delegates in the neighbourhood, close to 300. Some of the comments I want to make, some of the Members opposite might want to listen to this because, obviously, over the last year they've been sort of chastising this part of the House or this section of the House in saying that there's all kinds of negativity out there. That we're actually afraid to go out to our districts, we are afraid to make appearances because of the fact that people were going to be criticizing what we've done.

Mr. Speaker, I want to let you know today, that, in fact, is absolutely not accurate. Some of the Members opposite, some of them should probably take the initiative that this side of the House has taken and get out and really talk to the people that are at the grassroots and people who are doing the work to get a real feel for what exactly is happening.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, if I could take this opportunity, I just want to reference our Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment. It was clearly mentioned by Mr. Brian Peckford – get this, this is important. He's the President of PMA. He was at the symposium speaking in Gander on the weekend, and very emphatically

stated before the group, which was about 300 delegates, that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment is the best Minister of Municipal Affairs that he has dealt with in over 11 years.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I thought that was a compliment to our minister, and I'll make the statement again. This is from Brian Peckford, the President of the PMA – so it's not somebody on our side making that statement – who made the mention that the Minister of Municipal Affairs is the best Minister of Municipal Affairs that he has dealt with in over 11 years.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HAWKINS: Mr. Speaker, that certainly is a compliment.

I just too, as a result, want to mention that in fact the Minister of Municipal Affairs, as well as myself, along with the parliamentary secretary for the Minister of Municipal Affairs; we made ourselves available all Friday, all Saturday. We made it very, very clear to all members of the municipalities that were there, that we were available. Any issues, any concerns that they might have, they had an opportunity to address it to me as Minister of Transportation and Works, as well as the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

I must say, Mr. Speaker, I really, really appreciated that opportunity. Certainly, it was an opportunity for us to listen to some of the concerns they had. These are men and women who volunteer their time every single day to make sure the services that are provided in our municipalities are provided to the people who need them on a daily basis.

Mr. Speaker, I applaud the effort that these individuals put in. Many of them have been involved in volunteer work within municipalities for 20, 30 years. I'd just like to recognize – I know of three prominent municipal leaders that will not be seeking re-election in September, and that includes the Mayor of Gander, Mayor Claude Elliott, and the Mayor of Appleton, Derm Flynn, and the Mayor of Bonavista, Betty Fitzgerald.

These three individuals, Mr. Speaker, have made a significant contribution to this province over

the years. Many of them have gone above and beyond what is expected in their daily duties to make sure that the residents within their communities have the services that have been provided to them over the years.

So, Mr. Speaker, I thought it was appropriate today, even though I'm not the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment, but I thought it was appropriate for me today to mention this fact and certainly congratulate those three leaders for the significant amount of work they have done for this province and providing the service that they provided for the residents in their communities. I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, as I speak, there are many other leaders that are in many communities throughout this province that have provided exemplary service to their communities and they should be recognized for that.

Mr. Speaker, I want to continue on. I want to speak for a few minutes as well, because I think the Member opposite – I think it might have been last week, the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi last week or the week before – and she can correct me if I made the statement wrong, but she talked about P3s. I think she made the comment that we do not own the asset until after the 30 years or whatever the length of time. If she did not make that statement, Mr. Speaker, I apologize, but I thought that's the statement she made, and that's absolutely, totally incorrect. It's absolutely, totally incorrect.

Under the P3 model, Mr. Speaker, the day that we occupy the asset is the day that we own the asset. It's not 30 years down the road. We own that asset when we take possession of that asset. So I want to make that very, very clear, because unfortunately if we don't have an opportunity to get out and correct a lot of these mistakes, then –

AN HON. MEMBER: Misnomers.

MR. HAWKINS: Misnomers – then obviously that's all people tend to believe, and that is absolutely correct.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there were a couple of other comments that she did make that were correct, and I don't mind admitting that. She made a statement that as a government we can borrow

money cheaper than the private sector. It's absolutely correct. Absolutely correct; however, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that she failed to say when she talked about that, is the fact that we have done a value for money. When we did the value for money, part of the risk factor that's involved in the P3, all of these factors are taken into consideration. So the cost of borrowing by a private sector versus the cost of borrowing from the public sector is more expensive, but in fact that is taken into consideration.

Mr. Speaker, all of these factors, when the value for money is completed and all the risk factors are included as well as the quality assessment, the quantitative assessment, all the assessments that are done – and we have been very, very clear on this side of the House because the Members opposite keep asking us, well, give us the full information. We're not able to do that at this particular point in time because it is a very, very crucial time when we go through our RFQs, we're going through the RFP process. It's like you were out there and you're letting people know what cards you're holding in your hand before you actually deal. That's something that we have to be very careful.

I can assure the Members opposite that when we have completed all of our RFQs, all of the RFPs, we will make sure that all of that information will be provided not only to Members opposite, but also to the general public. We're looking at two major projects right now, Mr. Speaker, under the P3.

One of the sad parts about it is that we find ourselves in a very, very difficult financial situation following us taking office back in November, December of 2015; a very, very difficult fiscal situation, one that we had to address aggressively, one that we had to make difficult decisions quickly. As a result of that, it would be somewhat silly for us if we continue to do in this government the status quo. That's not acceptable and it was important for us as a government to look at other opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things and criticisms that we get from the P3s is that we're not looking at all models. Let me tell you, the P3 model is but one procurement model. The DFMD, design, build, finance and maintain, if I get my letters correct on that, is one procurement

model. And that gives us an opportunity not only to look at new ways, in our value-for-money analysis but go back and look at some of the traditional methods. Design and build, that's a traditional method.

The difference in this method is the fact we are looking at design, build, finance, maintain. Mr. Speaker, that's where it stops because we've had some criticism, people are saying: Oh, we're looking at opening up to the private sector and the public sector is not going to have jobs.

I think we've been very, very clear in saying that in those long-term care facilities, in the acute facilities, we have been very clear that the public sector – the public sector – will continue to do the services – the public sector, not the private sector. The public sector will provide those services, Mr. Speaker.

When we look at doing a cost analysis and we're looking at the best way to provide services, I am asking the Members opposite because there's some criticism of us doing a P3 in Corner Brook for the long-term care facility, for the acute care facility, are the Members opposite saying to us: Wait. We waited long enough with the PC government providing the acute care and the long-term care facility in Corner Brook; announced year after year, after year after year, for probably something about eight or nine years; nothing done about it.

Are the Members opposite suggesting to us, as a government, to tell the people in Corner Brook to wait another seven, eight or nine years so that we are in a fiscal position that we're able to provide that funding? Is that the message they're sending to the people of Corner Brook? If it is, I don't think the people on the West Coast will be very happy about that, Mr. Speaker.

We are looking at opportunities. We're looking at opportunities to provide assets, to provide buildings today, opportunities to invest today so that the people on the West Coast, the people in Central Newfoundland, when we're in the position to make that announcement, will see results. They will see investments and they look at opportunities and they will see results. I think that's important for us to understand that decisions that are made are in the best interest of the residents of the province.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes if you sit back on this side and you listen to what's happening and what some of the comments are from the other side, you'd swear that we're over here trying to find ways – how can we find ways to make things miserable for people? That's not true, Mr. Speaker. That is absolutely not true.

We are finding and trying to find ways to position this province so that we have a future; a future for our children; a future for our grandchildren. Not a future that is going to be burdened with debt forever. Some of the Members opposite may not really fully understand what financing is all about or fiscal responsibility, what that's all about. Because if you look at the situation we were in when we took government, you would wonder: How could this possibly happen?

Well, Mr. Speaker, it did. I've often said I've never been a quitter in my life. But when the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board released – and we talked about our challenges and what we were faced as a government, and I looked at last year, at the numbers, we started to work through – in order for us to provide the necessary funding so our employees could be paid, so their salaries could be paid, when you get to that point, Mr. Speaker, you can't get much lower than that.

That's a serious, serious crisis situation. What were the alternatives? We were told very quickly by bonding agencies, by banks, that you have a certain period of time to start showing us that you're getting your house in order. Mr. Speaker, we worked hard at that.

I want to make the Members opposite realize and know as well – and we've said this in the past – that generating revenue is not the only means to balance a budget. We have to look at not only revenue generation; we also have to look at expenditures. And that's what we're looking at.

Mr. Speaker, when the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board last year, when we talked about – and in Treasury Board looking at forecasting to get us to the position we are today and looking at what money we had to cut with regard to getting us to that position, I was somewhat skeptical, Mr. Speaker, to say the

least, at that time; however, our minister has performed above what's expected.

We are now in a position that other agencies – we're not looking at us as a government saying we're doing great; we're looking at independent agencies that are telling us that. We're looking at C.D. Howe saying that we are on the right course. We're getting recognition from agencies such as the Bank of Montreal. These are credible agencies that are giving us a report card on really what we've done the last year and it's very positive.

We're not there yet. We've got a lot of work to do. We will continue to work hard, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the people of this province. I think it's very, very important for all of us to realize that today, in today's climate, with all of the uncertainty that's out there and the volatility that's out there, we have to be very, very careful that we perform our fiduciary responsibilities, I would say on both sides of the House.

Both sides of this House have a fiduciary responsibility to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and I think it's important for all of us, and I'm sure we do – I'm sure everybody within this House, Members opposite and this side of the House take their responsibilities seriously.

Mr. Speaker, we have to find ways in which we work together. I know we have to and fro in this House, Question Period gets lively at times, but I think it's important for all of us to realize that we are a very, very small province when it comes to population, but a huge province when it comes to geography. That is one of the challenges that we have. How do we balance our small population with our large geography?

Mr. Speaker, we all understand and realize that every single person living in this province deserves and expects the same level of service, no matter if they live in Northern Labrador, if they live in a southern part of the Island of Newfoundland and Labrador, if they live in the beautiful Burin Peninsula.

We provide services. We provide ferry services to 11,000 people. Do the math on that, Mr. Speaker. We realize that in order to do that it's costing this province \$84 million a year.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. HAWKINS: Eighty-four million dollars a year.

Mr. Speaker, I think we all realize the significant challenges that we face. I'm optimistic that we are going to face these challenges and I'm also optimistic that we are going to overcome the challenges. We're going to seize the opportunities that we have. We're going to seize these opportunities, we're going to make the best of it and we're going to position this province, going forward, to be a province that we are all proud of and a province that our children and our grandchildren will not be saddled with a debt for their entire life, but will have a positive outlook to this province. Because, in all due respect to our friends from another province, this is the best province to live in, in Canada.

MR. SPEAKER (Warr): Order, please!

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Good afternoon, I'm pleased to have a chance to rise in this Concurrence debate, which is going to happen a few times during the budget approval process. There are three committees that will all debate a Concurrence Motion, which gives Members an additional opportunity to speak to the budget.

I know that Members of our caucus are eager to have another 20 minutes or so on each of the Concurrence debates to say a few words about what's going on related to the budget and the impact on people and families in our districts, but it also gives us a chance to talk about other issues that might be of concern to the public, as the Minister of Transportation and Works just did.

I'm glad to have another opportunity to rise and speak, and I'm sure a few more of us will do so as the afternoon continues. I'd like to begin by talking about an issue that was in the media last week and also an issue that I'm personally very concerned about. I think lots of Members of the House are very concerned about, and that's the issue of opioids and the fentanyl crisis that has hit Newfoundland and Labrador in a major way.

While there are a number of elements of the whole issue that I think the Minister of Health and Community Services and I very much agree on, there are some differences of opinion we do have in terms of how this crisis should be handled. Sometimes it's difficult in the to and fro of Question Period to fully articulate those issues and to fully explain why we may have a different point of view.

I'm going to take a few minutes during this debate this afternoon to talk a little bit more about the issue and to identify specifically the suggestions that I have for the minister. This is an ongoing issue. It's a growing issue. While there was an initial opioid action plan that I played a role in developing and the minister released in the last six months or so, it's a work in progress. There's still more work to be done. There are changes that do need to be made if we're going to effectively respond to this crisis.

Just to put it in perspective how serious this is: In British Columbia and Alberta – the two hardest hit provinces so far – fatal overdoses linked to fentanyl soared from 42 in 2012 to 418 in 2015. In the first 10 months of 2016 in British Columbia, 332 deaths were linked to bootleg fentanyl. Between January and October of last year in Alberta, 193 deaths were linked to fentanyl, out of 338 opioid-related overdose deaths.

Global News first reported in October 2016 some new statistics from Health Canada that showed an increase of more than 40 per cent in the number of street drugs testing positive for fentanyl across the country in 2016 compared to 2015. In Ontario, more than 700 people died in 2015 from opioid overdoses. They were not all fentanyl related, of course, but a good number of those deaths in Ontario were indeed fentanyl related.

In March of this year, it was reported that deaths linked to fentanyl more than doubled to 29 in Manitoba last year. Granted, Manitoba is a bigger province in population than Newfoundland and Labrador, but it's certainly a much smaller province than Ontario, Alberta or BC, the ones I've talked about so far. Twenty-nine deaths in Manitoba over the past year, last year, which was more than double the previous year.

In Ontario, fentanyl was the leading cause of opioid deaths for the first time in 2014, and those are the most recent figures that I could find. Several communities like Toronto, Kingston and some communities in the Niagara region have been hit with a spike in fatal overdoses, even in the past number of weeks.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there have been two recent deaths in Newfoundland and Labrador. The minister and I both acknowledge that two is too many. We're both grateful that many lives have been saved, thanks particularly to the great work of our first responders who've been heroic in their efforts to combat this crisis. But any deaths are too many deaths and I fear – this is not being dramatic. I legitimately and genuinely fear that there's going to be more despite our best efforts, despite government's best efforts, despite the efforts of first responders, despite the efforts of the community workers and the groups on the ground who are working to tackle this crisis.

I think there are some more things that can be done. I think there are some more things that should be done and I do have some specific recommendations for the minister on what that might look like. The minister said in a media interview with *The Telegram* back in January that we're not downtown Vancouver and that the crisis wouldn't hit Newfoundland and Labrador in the same way that it's hit BC, Alberta or Ontario. But when you look at our relative population, I would suggest that the crisis is real and the crisis is here. Any gaps that we can identify should be addressed because that may indeed save lives.

When I did some research on what's happening across the country on this issue, I was pleased to see the Ontario government in March make a decision to distribute naloxone kits free of charge at over 1,000 pharmacies throughout

Ontario. That covers a large number of communities, a large number of geographic regions throughout Ontario. Most people in Ontario and most people in Newfoundland and Labrador have some connection to a pharmacy and to a local pharmacist.

The challenge with the plan here in Newfoundland and Labrador is that the kits are only available in pharmacies if you have the money to buy them. They range in price from \$60 – I've heard \$60, I've heard \$70, I've heard \$85. This is a commercially available kit, it comes in a fancy case and it retails for around that price. The kits that are less fancy but do the exact same thing, that have been bought en masse by government and distributed in the province, cost a fraction of that. They cost \$14 or \$15 is my understanding.

Yes, the minister acknowledged last week that there are places around the province where you can get these kits if you call 811 and go through that process. Part of my concern with that approach is that there are other places where these kits can and should be made available; pharmacies are a perfect example. I think that approach taken by Ontario is indeed the right approach.

Part of the reason I believe it's the right approach is that we have opioid clinics, we have pain clinics, we have addictions clinics throughout the province. In my own community, on Commonwealth Avenue in Mount Pearl, there is an addictions clinic that sees about 100 patients each and every day of the year. Three hundred and sixty-five days a year that clinic is open.

There are other clinics, primarily attached to private pharmacies around the province where a similar circumstance exists. They're not all as big as the clinic on Commonwealth Avenue or the larger one, which I believe is on Lemarchant Road, but there are a number of these all over the province. I think there are something like 50. Those clinics don't have these kits.

Now, that said, a clinic can buy a kit and probably would have to do so given the work they're in. But if we're going to really tackle this crisis and we've got pharmacists who are trained and who are already dealing with segments of

the population that are very much at risk here, then it would make sense to engage them in being part of the solution and make kits available just like Ontario has done, and cover the cost of that.

These kits can actually save lives. The cost of these kits is rather minimal and they can save lives. One of the challenges I would say respectfully that I have with the current action plan is that there is no mention of any role or no mention of any involvement for pharmacists. When we're talking about pharmacists, we're talking about professionals who see people every day who are at risk.

Pharmacists are trained to give injections. We made changes to their scope of practice when we were in government to allow that to happen. They can also provide much needed education to those that need instruction in how to use a naloxone kit, for instance.

There are some groups on the ground that is doing incredible work as well. I think of the SWAP program here in this region that's been very involved in distributing the naloxone kits. There's a program called Street Reach, which one night a week in my own district makes kits available and does other great work for people that are dealing with homelessness and other challenges in our community.

I know that people can call 811 and register for a kit. I had people call and actually test that theory, but it was clear when we did that work that the process needed to be tightened up. It sounds from the minister's comments late last week, that there have been some positive changes made as a result of us raising issues and asking questions which is part of our role, and if it takes raising those issues in the House of Assembly to bring about that change then so be it.

Even with some improvements that have been made to the 811 protocol to distribute these kits, I don't think enough is being done. I think there are other ways to make these kits more readily accessible to those that might need them. The problem with the 811 approach is that it won't reach some of the most vulnerable people that could potentially need access to a naloxone kit.

In a case like my own community, you've got an addictions clinic with 100 people visiting it each and every day, and there's no kit provided. The only time one of these government kits is provided in my community is on Tuesday nights in the basement of a local church when Street Reach runs a drop-in program. So for those couple of hours if you happen to overdose there's a kit readily available, which most people wouldn't even know in our community; otherwise, it's not available. An addictions clinic would seem like a logical place to start but there are other places where I think kits could be available as well – like our high schools, for instance.

When we are talking about fentanyl overdoses, we're talking about a matter of minutes. The naloxone kits need to be available almost immediately. I'm certainly not a pharmacist or a doctor, but there's a precise amount of time where this treatment could potentially be effective and save someone's life.

The challenge is if there are young people who are experimenting with drugs of any kind, based on what's going on in our own communities today and based on what's going on across the country if you look at the trends, then any person, but particularly we're talking about young people in our schools, they could be experimenting with another drug that they would believe to be less harmful or serious or risky, that could be laced with fentanyl. So having these kits available in our schools seems like a logical part of an action plan to tackle this immediate crisis that's growing.

Speaking of schools, I also pointed out last week that I think there are changes needed to our approach around education and awareness on this issue. I pointed out some challenges that exist with the fentanyl info sheet that was sent by government to schools. I expressed that I didn't feel it was well written or well presented. It actually referred to inaccurate information in the media, sort of downplaying the media reports on this issue in recent months. I'm not sure that's a helpful approach in dealing with this crisis.

So I was pleased to hear the minister say that's now being revised. That there are changes going to be made to the educational materials, but

simply sending a memo to schools is not going to be sufficient in tackling this issue because there are a lot of people at risk right now. Again, I don't think that's being dramatic at all.

While our first responders have been absolutely heroic in dealing with this challenge, the prevention and early intervention efforts can't just simply focus on first responders, as important as they are. What about parents who know their kids are in trouble? Let's do whatever we can to make these kits as readily available as they can because they've already saved lives and they can save more.

What I'm simply asking the minister to do, and asking government to do, is involve our pharmacies, involve our high schools. We have kits that haven't been distributed. So let's make some more kits available in places where they logically should be available, and that could indeed save lives.

We pointed out last week in Question Period that training hadn't yet been conducted. Despite months of plans to do so, training hadn't been conducted with Royal Newfoundland Constabulary officers. Well, I'm pleased to report that late last week online training started for officers and kits were distributed to officers. I assume it would take several days to reach all shifts, but I know there were officers last week who were on duty, who received online training and were also provided with kits following us raising the issue and questions being asked.

There has been some positive change over the past week but still not enough. We need to do more in terms of education. Making sure all of our first responders are trained, have access to kits is obviously important. I'm confident that will happen, but we also need to make these kits available in our pharmacies. We also need to engage our pharmacists who can be part of the solution. We need to make the kits available in our schools as well. It's sad that that is what's required, but I really believe that is what's required and that is what will save lives.

I have a few minutes left, and I want to share something I received from somebody who works at an addictions clinic in our province. She sent me a note in recent days, and these are her words, not mine, Mr. Speaker.

It's sad that people are making such negative comments on Twitter about addicts. I always say that those that live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones. I hope and pray that they themselves don't have kids or family members that may be harmed by this coming tsunami.

Newfoundland and Labrador's population is not the same as BC or other provinces, I agree, but if you reverse your thinking, every family in Newfoundland and Labrador will be affected. Maybe not directly but, so far, someone knows someone who knows someone that has an addict in their family. If they say they don't, they are in denial. Do the math; 14 overdoses and two deaths in seven days in a small population of 500,000, compared to the number of overdoses in the population of BC in one week, I'd say that could be comparable.

They really don't understand that this is a disease. Because of their brain chemistry, they now require some sort of opioid every day. It's no longer a choice for them. This is not a lifestyle they can change without medication and help. We treat our diabetics and cover insulin. Why is naloxone not covered as a regular benefit? Is one disease more important than another?

Take the money that we're paying for that phone call to 811 and put it towards more kits and education. There's your money for coverage. I've now met many addicts and I can say 100 per cent that there's not one of them that I've met so far who would choose this lifestyle again, if they had a choice to do it all over again. So much more education is needed. I'm so disappointed in some of the responses.

I have addiction patients that would love to give back to their community. They would talk to students. They want their story to be heard so that it will hopefully prevent another from going down that road. They would love to mentor younger addicts. They want to work. They want to be productive. One of the patients said to me today, this disease has paralysed her; she's stuck. Is that not a cry for help? And there are a lot of people who need help.

And we're not talking about the 1970s stereotypical view of what a drug addict is. The world has changed. As that person who works

with people dealing with addictions outlined, these are people who are in our community who perhaps none of us would ever suspect would be dealing with an addiction issue caused by opioids. That's what we're talking about.

On top of that, we now have a situation where some of the drugs on the street have been laced with fentanyl and something as small as a grain of salt, that kind of amount of fentanyl could actually be lethal, which is why this is such a complex crisis.

There are more things that can be done; there are more things that should be done. Outside of Question Period, if we have an opportunity like this to talk about the issue in a sensible way and outline some of the things that could actually be done in a constructive way to make government's opioid action plan better, then I think we've got a responsibility to do that.

I know that the minister took some exception to my comments in the House and in the media last week. I stand by my comments. They might be more succinct than my comments this afternoon, but they're not much different in terms of the content.

We have an opportunity to improve education inside and outside our schools. The information that's been provided to educators to date is not adequate. We need to move quickly to make sure that they have the right kind of information in the right kind of presentation to touch young people in our schools.

We have trained pharmacists who can give injections. We have trained professional pharmacists who can identify people who may need these naloxone kits. We have pharmacists that can provide instruction and counselling to patients or parents of patients or loved ones of patients who may need to know how to use a naloxone kit. We should do what Ontario has done to make those kits available through our pharmacies free of charge.

Sadly, Mr. Speaker, once again, I call on government to make these kits available in our schools as well. Simply saying call 811 and register and drive to some site that, in some cases, could be a great distance from your home, that's not an appropriate solution when we have

– that's part of the solution, but it can't be the only solution when we could make these kits readily available through schools and through pharmacies, and working with other community partners as well. At the very least, our 50 addictions clinics should have these kits available and they should be provided by government.

It doesn't look like I'm going to get much time to talk about issues related to the budget because the clock is about to wind down. I'd like to finish by thanking those who are working in our communities on the ground to try and tackle this crisis, groups like Street Reach, groups like the SWAP program and the AIDS Committee of Newfoundland and Labrador and also our first responders who have gone above and beyond the call of duty to save lives. But if some of the steps that I'm talking about this afternoon are not taken, I fear that more lives unnecessarily will be lost and there is more that can be done.

I'm glad to have a chance this afternoon to rise once again and really urge the minister to listen to those suggestions and hopefully act on them. They're not just coming from me, Mr. Speaker, they're coming from workers on the ground in our communities, they're coming from our province's pharmacists and they're coming from others who want to be part of helping us tackle this very serious crisis.

Thanks for the opportunity to participate in the debate this afternoon.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure for me to rise here again today and speak to the motion. I would like to start by talking about what the Minister of Transportation and Works referred to earlier, and that's the symposium that took place in Gander this past weekend.

Of course, as we all know, it's organized by Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador, by the board of directors under President Karen Oldford – her board of directors and the

wonderful staff that work at MNL. It takes a lot of work to organize such an event. This annual symposium has been going on for some time. This year, if not the record attendance, it certainly was very close to it. There were over 300 delegates registered for the symposium. It goes to show that there is still considerable interest by municipal leaders in this province to support and to represent their communities to the best of their ability.

As the minister alluded to as well – I was there, as well as the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment and the Minister of Transportation and Works and also the Member for St. George's – Humber was there for a short time. I was surprised that actually there was nobody there from either Opposition Party. Normally, they would have an interest in this because it's their Members as well that are attending those sessions. I must say this year there were some great topics and a great interest in the sessions that were organized by the board.

Mr. Speaker, I think one of the things that I notice every time I go to these meetings is the amount of municipal experience that's in the room. This being an election year, I fear that we're going to lose a lot of that experience that's there. Although there were some younger people there, we need to get that interest going and get people motivated to run in municipal elections and to represent their communities.

When you see people like Mayor Elliott with 27, 28 years of experience in municipal government; Mayor Flynn who represented both the Town of Wabush and the Town of Appleton, 32 years of experience, it's a long time in municipal government – and he was also president of Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador. Mayor Fitzgerald from the beautiful, historic Town of Bonavista, this is her last year and she will not be seeking re-election. So when you put that together, you're looking at about 60, 70 years of experience that is gone out the door. As we all know in any of those organizations, that experience is not easy to replace.

One of the things I want to touch on from the weekend, Mr. Speaker, was the session that was held on Saturday on regional governance and the consultations that will be happening this fall around the province on a regional governance

model. I want to congratulate the Regional Government Advisory Committee which is organized by our department with representation from around the province, from MNL, from PMA and from other organizations that have put forward several proposals and recommendations for how municipal government would look like in this province.

We all know, and everybody who is imminent in municipal government today realizes and knows that the present form, system of municipal government is not sustainable in this province. We have to change how we do things and how we look at things, but one of the things that really was discussed was the makeup of what a regional government would look like. Besides the existing municipalities that we have, the 276 municipalities that we have around the province, there are many local service districts and non-incorporated areas.

The proposal from the committee is that these local service districts and non-incorporated areas would be included in any form of regional governance model that would be out there. How that would be done would be around – those governance would be spilt up around where there is a certain population criteria and the sustainability of certain areas, certain regions, certain municipalities, certain towns, certain LSDs in the province.

One of the things they put forward, Mr. Speaker, was the proposed – or I should say, not proposed but some of the suggested boundaries around how regional government would look like in this province. It was astounding to me when I saw the map that was done for the province around this, how similar it was – and many of us in this room would remember, certainly the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune would remember, the makeup of the regional economic development boards that we had in this province.

We had, I think it was 21 REDBs in this province, or 20 – sorry, 20. I'm getting my numbers mixed up because what the proposal is for regional government is 21. So we would have to assume, and if you see the makeup of the map, the proposed regional governments around the province are very similar to the makeup of

the regional economic boards that this past administration saw fit to get rid of.

Regional economic development boards around this province, for the most part were very successful. I know one, certainly around Green Bay, was one of the most successful ones that ever was created. The Coast of Bays and some areas around the province were very, very successful, but the previous administration had destroyed all that and got rid of the regional economic development boards during their mandate. It's amazing really, how close the boundaries were when we looked at the proposed boundaries for the regional government.

Well, Mr. Speaker, there's a lot more to come on that because this fall there will be consultations around the province throughout the – I forget the number now, but all areas of the province will be covered and there will be public consultations whereby members of the public will be invited. One of the areas that is being encouraged is the people who live in LSDs and unincorporated areas because they would probably be the ones that would be most affected by any form of regional government in this province.

So I look forward to those consultations and what the final recommendations will be from these consultations and how municipal government will look in this province in the future. There's a lot of work to be done yet. I must say, our department has worked very hard over the past few months to get where we are today through the Regional Government Advisory Committee. To see the work that's been done in such a short time is really amazing.

Mr. Speaker, again, I want to go back to some of the rhetoric that's coming out of the Opposition parties regarding the 2017-2018 budget where they claim it's only a continuation of the 2016 budget. Well, there are a lot of things in this budget, in 2017-2018, and that came quite clear this past weekend in Gander with municipal government.

Municipal government is looking forward to the next few years because there's a lot of work being done. We know water and sewer projects are a priority for us as a government and certainly for municipalities as well. When we

look at, especially around clean drinking water, we are making progress, Mr. Speaker.

One of the things that's gone unclaimed or not being said enough is the fact that – boil-water advisories. For the first time in 12 years, Mr. Speaker, the number of boil-water advisories has dropped below 200. So we must be doing something right when you talk about what we're doing for our municipalities across this province.

We will continue to invest in municipal infrastructure, Mr. Speaker. In fact, the budget says \$100 million for municipal infrastructure over the next three years through the Multi-Year Capital Works and the Municipal Capital Works. That's just two pots of money.

One of the things we've done as a government – and the minister makes it quite clear and who has done a fantastic job with the Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment – is the fact that he's managed to leverage federal dollars to bring into this province, especially when you talk about water and waste water. We all know where the waste water regulations are and how important that is to our environment, and to be able to treat waste water going into our ponds, our lakes and our bays. It's a priority for all of us. Municipalities recognize that as well.

There are all kinds of pots of money out there that we've been able to leverage for the next three or four years from the federal government between the Building Canada Fund, through the waste water and water fund. It's important for all our residents because we need to have strong communities in this province.

One of the things that municipalities are quite pleased about is the fact that we've been able to – during these tough financial times, tough fiscal restraints that we have in place – maintain funding for the municipalities. In fact, we've increased it, because through – we've maintained the \$22 million for Municipal Operating Grants. We've maintained the \$23.3 million to maintain the HST rebate program for municipalities.

This year we've increased to \$7.1 million for provincial gas tax revenue which is increased to one cent now per litre this year; \$6.5 million in provincial funding to assist in repairs and

response to the 2016 Thanksgiving rainstorm event that we were able to leverage from our contingency fund, our slush fund that they were so quick to contradict us for; \$2 million for a Special Assistance Grants Program to assist communities with emergency and small capital needs.

It was only last week, Mr. Speaker, that I had the privilege to represent the minister down in Pouch Cove for a \$3.8 million project for clean drinking water, where the Member for the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis was in attendance and recognized our efforts as well, I might add, for being able to get to the point where we could finally finance that project, which has been ongoing for many years. We were able to announce that last week so the people of Pouch Cove can have access to clean drinking water and get off boil water advisories. That's our priority, Mr. Speaker, as a government.

So don't say to us that the 2017-2018 budget is just a continuation of 2016 when we had to bring in the strong measures to deal with the fiscal mess that we were left with, because that's not what we're doing. Mr. Speaker, what we are doing is we are accessing funds whether it's through the federal government or other means to be able to deal and address the issues that still face this province, and waste water and drinking water are certainly two of the top priorities that we need to address.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, it's the first time in 12 years that boil water advisories have dropped below 200. I don't know if people realize what a major accomplishment that is. To say that this budget is just a continuation of the cuts that we put in place in the last budget is totally false. It's a lot more than that; it's dealing with the issues that face our province. I could go on and on.

I tell you, this past weekend, the mayors and councillors that were there representing their communities recognized that. They applauded the minister for taking the action that needed to be done, and both ministers, by the way, made themselves available to meet with many municipalities to deal with the issues.

Mr. Speaker, one thing I wanted to do is to go back to what I spoke about last week and the

report from the C.D. Howe Institute, who is probably one of the most renowned financial institutes in this province – the fact they recognized that the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and the Finance Minister, the Premier and the Cabinet are making the right decisions to get our fiscal house in order and to get this province back on track.

When you look over the past number of years, the ratings that the previous administration had gotten around accountability and transparency and releasing the numbers, it's really, really amazing that we've managed to survive at all. When you look at getting a grading in 2011-2012 of F, D in 2012-2013, D in 2014-2015 and an E in 2015-2016; but, in 2016-2017, Mr. Speaker, we are at a B.

So to say, the rhetoric from the other side, that we're not doing anything to help the people of this province is really false, Mr. Speaker, because we are doing what we can with the fiscal resources that we have available to us. I guarantee you, when you come into office and you're faced with a \$2.2 billion deficit and if we hadn't addressed that, it would have grown to \$2.7 billion, serious decisions had to be made, and we made them.

The institutes, like C.D. Howe, recognized that they had to be made. They have complimented us for taking the mess in hand and dealing with it, and dealing with it in a responsible and accountable manner, which is what government should be doing, Mr. Speaker. It's not about doing what's right, politically; it's doing what's right for the province, for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We couldn't go on. The deficit just could not continue to grow. When you look at what C.D. Howe has done and what they've reported on, that we are on the right track. It says the one area in which the report marks potential improvement is with consistency in the preparation of Estimates.

Now, we're all going through these procedures in Estimates. I must say that I've attended a few of them and some good questions are being asked. But, more importantly, some good answers have been given. The ministers, I

guarantee you, and the departments are well prepared, because they have the answers and their answers make sense, Mr. Speaker. They are responsible answers, and it's a responsible way of dealing with the finances of this province. Because no way could we have continued on down the road that we were headed. It would have been a road to disaster.

Just as another example: In the 2012 fiscal accountability report, Newfoundland and Labrador was ranked among the provinces that do not present straightforward and comparable figures in their budgets or Public Accounts. The lack of fiscal accountability was consistent. Newfoundland and Labrador was consistently in the lowest ranking among the provinces.

So this was at a time, Mr. Speaker, when we had money and we had the finances to deal with the issues of the day. Yet, the accountability and the transparency of the previous administration was pretty well nil according to the C.D. Howe Institute.

Mr. Speaker, again, municipalities this past week that were there recognized that we had tough decisions to make. One of the things we keep hearing from them and from many people in the province is that they talked about us, we've only been in office for a year and a half and, basically, what they're saying is one year in office can't fix what 12 years of mismanagement created. That's that bottom line, Mr. Speaker. One year in office and you can't expect us to solve every problem that was created for the last 12 years of mismanagement in this province.

We've come a long way. Municipalities, I must say – and the minister was there over the weekend, and I know he talked to several mayors and councillors, as well as I did, because I know most of them on a personal basis. They recognize the fact that we had very tough decisions to make but, more importantly, they're very thankful and appreciative of the fact that we continue to invest in the municipalities in this province. We continue to invest in water and sewer. We continue to invest in infrastructure. We continue to invest in the municipalities from Pouch Cove to Labrador West. We will continue to do that, as long as we can leverage the funds to make it happen. That's what we've been doing. That's been the priority of this minister.

Mr. Speaker, before I sit down, I want to take just a couple seconds to wish our Page, Crystal, a very happy birthday.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LETTO: I don't know how old she is, Mr. Speaker. That's her personal information, but she's not as old as me.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. PERRY: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

It's certainly an honour and a privilege to rise in this hon. House today and speak to Concurrence debate on the Social Services Committee. I would like to thank my colleagues, both on this side of the House and Members opposite, for the debate that we engaged in with respect to the budget of the House and, in particular, the departments relating to social services program.

I have to say that in our Estimates session, I was extremely disappointed. It ran for 3½ hours, so I was very pleased that we did get an additional half an hour of time but, unfortunately, we got very, very few answers during our session.

In talking with my colleagues, we always ask for the binder. When you go to Estimates, the ministers have a binder, it's several inches thick and it contains all the answers to possible questions.

Most of the ministers at the end of the Estimates session just passed over their *Estimates* book. We had our Estimates last week and I'm still waiting for the *Estimates* book from our session. So I truly do hope it arrives very soon because most of my colleagues got them at the very end of their Estimates session on that very day.

We have pages and pages and pages of questions that we are awaiting answers on, so we certainly do look forward to that because really what the people of the province are looking for are just

straight answers. We truly hope the Liberals at some point in time are going to start honouring their commitment to be open and accountable. Estimates are a great way to do that.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to speak today – you know, at the end of the day we're all here because we want a better Newfoundland and Labrador. In fairness to the people of the province, in October or November of 2015, they were told by the Liberal Party during their campaign material, you vote for us and you will have a better tomorrow. Here we are two years in and what do we get? Are we any better off with a Liberal government?

The vast majority, the overwhelming majority of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians today, as evidenced in our polls and as evidenced in the commentary that you see on various social media sites is that people are definitely worse off. We're worse off than what we have been for well over a decade in fact, Mr. Speaker. I don't think we've seen this type of economic disparity in our province since the '90s, the last time the Liberals were in power.

I'm going to drill down a little bit into that, Mr. Speaker, and ask the question: Are youth better off two years into a Liberal government than what they were? Absolutely not. We've seen cuts to youth programming, almost every youth program that is there. Everyone is in constant apprehension about where the axe is going to fall next.

Are they better off when it comes to achieving a post-secondary education? Absolutely not. Today they're facing the very real possibility of tuition hikes, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, our youth are not better off under a Liberal government.

Are seniors better off under a Liberal government? Well, they like to take their spin doctors and say we've increased the amount of refund that you're going to get. Yeah, but you took away the HST refund. You took away the Residential Energy Efficiency Program. You took away drug coverage. You took away an hour of home care per day for our seniors who so desperately need this home care. You increased the amount of money they have to pay for that home care from 15 per cent of their net income to 18 per cent of their net income. You

took away their coverage for non-prescription medication. Are seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador better off under the Liberal government? Absolutely not.

Are persons with disabilities better off under a Liberal government? Through the Estimates, Mr. Speaker, we learned yet again of another cut of \$50,000 to our valuable programs for persons with disabilities. Are they better off under a Liberal government? Absolutely not.

Are municipalities better off under a Liberal government? Well, we've seen changes to the funding formula that sees some communities who were once availing of the wonderful program at a 90-10, which was affordable to them with their tax bases, being cut in some cases to 60-40, 80-20. Are municipalities better off under a Liberal government? Absolutely not.

Are civil servants better off under a Liberal government? Well, the civil servants we're talking to are absolutely not feeling like they're better off. In fact, they voted for the Liberals because they were promised absolutely no job cuts. Lo and behold, what do we see? We see, under the guise of restructuring in some cases, job cuts.

There is a list, Mr. Speaker. We're still trying to drill down and ascertain exactly what's happening because they're certainly not trying to make it very clear for people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, or for the media, but there's a list by department of how many positions are being cut to find management efficiencies across the departments.

In some cases you'll see 19 positions being cut from this department, but we are creating four more as we go about this because we are restructuring. Lo and behold, who is getting hired under those four new jobs? A very creative way of trying to eliminate the jobs of the people who are bona fide, experienced, qualified people with perhaps no political ties to create jobs for their Liberal friends, and we're seeing it time after time after time. We're still digging. We're still trying to find it out, and between ourselves, the people of the province and the media, I'm sure the truth will all come to light at some point.

Mr. Speaker, hypocrisy is a word I was always told, for 10 years since I've been sitting in this House, was not permitted, but it's been used in a lot of speeches in the House to date. So I'm going to try it today as well. I'm going to talk about it in the context of a spending problem.

The Liberals in their spin doctoring and in their messaging have tried to really convince the people of this province that the real problem, not the oil crisis that has affected every other province and every other place throughout the globe – no, no it's not oil in Newfoundland. Newfoundland and Labrador is unique. The problem in Newfoundland and Labrador was all created by overspending. Yet, what have the Liberals done? They increased the spending on the bottom line by \$300 million.

If you don't believe me, Mr. Speaker, and I hear a little bit of heckling from Members opposite, *Hansard* will clearly show you. The Minister of Finance, while serving as the Opposition critic, condemned Members of this government for wastage. In her speech in *Hansard* – it's all right there – listed things like hiring consultants as an example of wastage.

Yet, what did the Liberals do right out of the gate as soon as they got in power? The first thing, they hired their Liberal consulting friends to handle collective bargaining for them. They hired consultants to travel the province and evaluate the status of our libraries. They didn't even bother to send their own minister to hear from the people first-hand. We will listen they said, but they aren't there to listen. Instead, they're sending the consultants across the province and continuing a pattern that they identified well in Opposition of wastage.

I have more examples of wastage, Mr. Speaker, and a big one is the severance that they're paying to the bona fide people who have earned their jobs because of their merit and because of their abilities. They're paying them huge severance cheques to send them out the door so that they can pave the way to create jobs for their Liberal friends.

Mr. Speaker, we're all very disappointed in Newfoundland and Labrador, even those of us who are Members opposite, because at the end of the day we all want a better Newfoundland

and Labrador. We are so gravely disappointed in the Liberal government for their lack of leadership in this regard and their lack of direction in this regard.

I will say as often as I get the opportunity – because we all know how politics works – we fully anticipate that next year and the year after we're somehow miraculously going to become cash flush and the money is miraculously going to start flowing as we get closer to an election.

The onus is on us, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, to say to our politicians: We're not going to tolerate this anymore. We're not going to be treated like fools. We're not going to accept you assuming that we aren't intelligent, and I'll use the word stupid because sometimes I get the impression that that's what the Members opposite think, that all the rest of us are stupid because it's mindboggling some of the stuff they try to sell us.

No matter how much money they start to throw around in the next two years, it is incumbent upon us as the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador to remember, they sold us a bill of goods in 2015 that they did not honour. If we give them a second term in government, if we think it's bad now –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. PERRY: – look out as to what's going to happen with another four years of power because it will be far worse than what we're seeing today, Mr. Speaker.

I truly hope the people of Newfoundland and Labrador send a resounding message, not just to Members opposite but to Members on this side of the House as well. We're not tolerating –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I recognize the hon. the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune.

MS. PERRY: Thank you. I thank you for your protection, Mr. Speaker.

The message the people of Newfoundland and Labrador need to send to all politicians of all parties, and I'm a politician myself, is that we're not tolerating this anymore. We expect better from our politicians. We expect honesty from our politicians. If you can't do something, tell us why.

That is exactly what I truly hope the people of Newfoundland and Labrador will deliver in 2019, and that's a very balanced government. Not one that is top weighted with 30 seats on one side that allows the government to do whatever they wish because they tell the backbench how to vote and the backbench particularly in the early years goes along with it. As they gain more experience they will also gain stronger, solid footing and will have more of a backbone to stand up to things they don't believe in, Mr. Speaker.

It's really unfortunate, because I was hoping we would find 11 people last year that would vote against that budget. Unfortunately, it didn't happen, and we today find ourselves with the worst economy that we've had in Newfoundland and Labrador, as I've said, since the '90s.

It has been clearly stated, it doesn't have to be said by us, you can read the Conference Board of Canada's reports. Our economy is in the state it's in because of the regressive policy measures put in place by the Liberal government. They taxed us to the point where our economy is falling apart, and it's all because of the decisions that were made by a handful of policy-makers from Members opposite, not all of them. Not all of the Members opposite participated in that decision. Hopefully, before 2019 we're going to see some of them stand up and say we're just not going to take it anymore as some of these bad decisions try to be forced upon us.

It seems like I switched from – my last speech was something very positive. I have several more opportunities to get up and speak to budget debate, so I certainly am going to talk more about economic opportunities.

We see from the press releases that have been issued this afternoon that tomorrow we're going to get an announcement on a new Cabinet committee about jobs. It brings back in memory for me, and it's starting to show that I'm getting

a bit long in the tooth. I remember the old Cabinet committee on rural revitalization. It was a Liberal creation, I think back in 2001-2002. It never yielded any success then, so I truly hope there's more effort put under way.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MS. PERRY: I hear some heckling from my colleague opposite about regional economic development boards, and I will say I was very disappointed. I truly believe there is a strong need for regional co-operation among communities.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It seems like I'm rattling some chains there today.

I'm a believer in regional economic development and I'm a believer in co-operation. Where economies of scale can be achieved and where shared resources can lower the cost of providing valuable services for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, then I think that in all sincerity we should look at it. We should look at it closely and keep an open mind to considering it because at the end of the day we don't have a large population in this province but we do have quite a large geography.

In my district alone, 11,000 square kilometres spread over 21 communities, the populations in my communities range from about 60 to a maximum of maybe 1,700 in Harbour Breton. So there are efficiencies to be achieved by working together. We can share training resources for our fire services. We can share expertise related to managing our water and sewer systems. We can share expertise with respect to economic development. We can share resources with respect to administrations and fabulous opportunities.

I think all Members on this side of the House will work co-operatively with you in terms of exploring what potential there is out there to make things more efficient, Mr. Speaker, and something we're all open to, but one of the

things we're not going to tolerate on this side of the House is the spin doctoring. As we see it happen we will call it out. I fully expect that Members opposite will get up and have a ferocious speech when I sit down in a few minutes, Mr. Speaker.

I've been at this long enough now that I believe in calling it as I see it. I truly believe we have no place trying to tell people what to think. We have a responsibility to give people the accurate information, 'undoctored,' no spin and let people form decisions for themselves.

I also believe, Mr. Speaker, that people in this province are not stupid. We're far, far smarter all across this province than what the Members opposite give the people of this province credit for. I will say again as I close up, before I wrap up, the Liberals promised a better tomorrow; no layoffs, no tax hikes. What did they do? Three hundred tax hikes, 50 new fees that we never ever heard of before. Restaurants are closing down on a daily basis; businesses are shutting down on a weekly basis.

When the Minister of Finance tabulates all of the taxes she collected this year from businesses in Newfoundland and Labrador, I'm anxious to see how much of a significant drop there is in that because we're seeing a drop in the number of business people. We are seeing people move away. They're taking their children with them. Grandparents are losing their grandchildren and they're starting to say: We want to be with our children and grandchildren, maybe we're not going to stay in Newfoundland and Labrador either. We have to reverse that tide.

The people of Newfoundland and Labrador need to come forward, we need to stand up and say: Absolutely not. We are not going to tolerate being promised one thing but being delivered another. We're not going to buy into – and I'm going to use the word – “baloney” that's fed to us.

The time has come for truth, Mr. Speaker, and the truth of the matter is if there was a spending problem, why have you increased spending by \$300 million? If there was truly a spending problem, why are you laying people off paying out hundreds of thousands in severance to make

room for your Liberal friends? It doesn't make any sense, Mr. Speaker.

The people of Newfoundland and Labrador see through it, Mr. Speaker. We have a responsibility, no matter how much they come at us with goodies in the next two years, to say we do not forget that you misled us in 2015. We have a message for our politicians, we expect better. I truly hope that we will achieve better come 2019.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to speak to the Concurrence debate this afternoon. I felt compelled to stand in my seat here today, get up and address what I believe the Opposition – they're lost in a book of fiction. When it comes to the information that's put forward by the Member opposite for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune, there are a lot of things that need to be corrected.

She talked about the RED Boards, the Regional Economic Development Boards, saying it was something she believed in and something she supported, yet she voted in favour of cutting their funding which caused them to be eliminated.

When it comes to business here in Newfoundland and Labrador, we have one of the lowest small-business tax rates in the country at 3 per cent. That's a great rate that we have. We're the third lowest in the county. That's a highly competitive rate and we've seen where a lot of small businesses are opening here in Newfoundland and Labrador. If I look at the Member for Bonavista and the number of businesses that have opened, particularly, on that peninsula, is more than half a dozen and these are start-ups.

We've just launched Innovation Week here in Newfoundland and Labrador. If we look at the innovation sector, it's 170 companies in

Newfoundland and Labrador; 4,000 jobs valued at \$1.6 billion and growing – growing, Mr. Speaker. This is all exciting things that's happening right here in Newfoundland and Labrador. But when the Member opposite talks about the people who are leaving in droves and droves, when the Census came out last year, the Census by Stats Canada, it showed the information that the population numbers had increased.

We have to combat the negative trends and the indicators that have come before us, and that's because of poor governance by over a decade of the Progressive Conservative government. I will go back to PC math, as I have before in this House. I want to highlight that in 2010, the deficit was \$194 million. That's a loss of \$194 million by the PCs. Then in 2011-2012, they had a surplus of \$883 million, followed by a deficit of \$563.8 million in 2012; 2013, a deficit of another half a billion-plus. Then 2014-2015, almost \$600 million in deficit; then 2015-2016, they're last year in office, \$986 million – almost a billion dollars in deficit. I mean, this is consecutive spending deficits that they had when there were periods of \$100-plus barrel of oil.

If we go back to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, a report that they released, it monitored government spending and it said the PC administration overspent by \$11 billion from 2003 to 2014. That's \$11 billion, Mr. Speaker. That's quite significant. And in 2014-2015, Newfoundland and Labrador had the highest per capita expenditure on programs in the country at \$13,200 per person.

If we look at salaries and employee benefits, they represented 49 per cent of government operating spending in 2014, compared to 40 per cent in 2003. Between 2003 and 2014, real spending in the Department of Finance increased by 650 per cent, the highest among provincial departments.

Mr. Speaker, that was under the former PC administration when we also had a former minister of Finance who admitted to not being good at math. We have a Finance Minister who is very astute, very understanding and understands financial management. We've been able to take what would have been a \$2.7 billion deficit down this year to reach our target in

projection of under \$800 million in deficit. That is no small feat, Mr. Speaker, and we all as a collective had to make sacrifices, had to make difficult decisions to get the province back on track, to get us back to surplus in 2022-2023.

I want to point out, though, that in one department, the Department of Municipal Affairs saw a huge cut under their view of 33 per cent during that same period, while Finance increased. As well as the largest decrease recorded was the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture, a cut of 52 per cent. So this is quite ironic. If you examine what the PC Party and the Member opposite says about the Liberal government not being committed to the fishery in the province, how much they've invested in the fishery, how much it grew under their administration – a decline of 52 per cent. That's quite astounding, unbelievable.

When you look at the investments that are being made for jobs and in the economy, the focus of our Premier into *The Way Forward*, it is going to create 14,000 person years of employment through infrastructure, through looking at sectors of the economy. We have very strategic investments that are put forward.

The Minister of Transportation and Works has released multi-year road plans, multi-year marine plans, multi-year infrastructure plans. Tenders are out early. This allows for competitive bidding. It allows for the costs to be reduced to the taxpayers. It allows for more work to be done, more consistency. These are creating real-time, planned jobs for people in Newfoundland and Labrador. This shows that this government is on the right track when it comes to making investments. I believe last year the minister highlighted that there was 90 kilometres more of roadwork done with less money spent on roads. So we're getting better value.

There are lots of things that are happening. When we look at what we're doing in our seafood industry: more than \$5 million investment in the wild fishery and aquaculture industries; \$2.8 million in an aquaculture capital equity investment fund; \$2 million in a Seafood Innovation and Transition Program. This is highly important, because I have a lot of fishers in my district. I have a lot people, like many

people in Newfoundland and Labrador, that depend on the fishery for jobs. When it comes to the harvesting sector, when it comes to the processing sector, the service and supply and all the spinoffs that are there, the fishery is highly important to the district of St. Barbe, L'Anse Aux Meadows.

This is why \$2 million to help support technology and innovation and harvesting, processing, aquaculture and marketing, with a focus on the recovery of groundfish – because we're at a very critical time in the history of our fishery where transition is important, where there are other species that will come into play. Whether we're looking at codfish, whether we're looking at redfish, whether we're looking at other underutilized species, there are a variety of species out there, and a way of which we can work with our harvesters and our processors to transition.

With the federal government investing \$100 million earmarked for Newfoundland and Labrador in a federal fisheries innovation fund, that's highly important. There's a new Fisheries Advisory Council in place, and there's a Fish Plant Worker Employment Support Program that was sunset by the previous administration – something that they saw to abolish.

One of the important measures that are going to help a lot of people with relief in budget 2017-2018 is that 75 per cent of the temporary gas tax will be removed by December 1, 2017. On June 1, 8.5 cents will be removed, plus the HST that's on top of that. So we're looking at consumers seeing a relief of close to 10 cents at the pumps when it comes to June 1 on gasoline. That's an important piece when it comes to looking at the use of those who are moving goods and services, when it comes to small business, when it comes to consumers, when it comes to visitors to our province.

We saw a banner year when it came to tourism last year, all over this province, when it comes to the number of accommodations, the number of touring groups. The airport numbers were up significantly: Deer Lake, St. John's. We saw our Visitor Information Centres up. Our provincial historic sites, they were all up. They almost saw 100,000 people.

The Rooms visitation alone saw an increase of 21,000 people. That's significant. Commercial revenue at The Rooms increased by \$185,000. The Rooms website saw a 23 per cent increase in visitation from March 31 to September 8, 2016 as compared to the same period the year previous. The Rooms received 16 awards since opening and received nationally to the quality of all the work that's being presented. More recent awards received: the Canadian Museums Association national award for best marketing, the Pinnacle Award, the Silver Leaf Award and the St. John's Board of Trade Business Excellence Award.

There's also a new cultural immersions program that's being implemented on June 19, with an aim to attract new visitors. It's being developed for new aspects to focus on our traditional culture, programming such as food and music experiences, gallery tours, customized experiences and many more. Gerry Squires, a retrospective exhibition, is opening in mid-May – just next week actually, Mr. Speaker, and running throughout the summer season, so we encourage everybody to get out there. The Rooms has new opening hours. They're open daily every single day now throughout the summer, and possibly Friday and even Saturday they'll be open in the evenings.

So there are a lot of great things that's happening at The Rooms and I don't want to miss them when I speak to the budget. I do also want to highlight that in Budget 2017-2018 we've increased our investment into culture and heritage more than \$20 million just in the department. Government-wide, we invest way more into culture and heritage because there are investments with my colleague through the Department of Education, they invest, and there are many others.

Yes, in film alone we've seen equity increase and we've seen a lot of great things happen when it comes to film. *Maudie* is a great example of where the Film Development Corporation put in \$925,000 to see this production. It's already won awards, *Maudie* – Mary Sexton, and a lot of great things telling a Nova Scotia story but filmed primarily in Newfoundland and Labrador.

It speaks to the attribute of what we have to offer. We have \$13 million in our marketing campaign. We also have \$8 million in an Investment Attraction Fund, designed to encourage and support foreign direct investment. Our venture capital fund as well is seeing uptake and increase in support. We have \$14.4 million investment in economic and business programs to support communities and other groups as they identify projects and support a catalyst for new business activity.

I'm looking forward to working closely with my colleague, the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills, to put a real focus on entrepreneurship and innovation when it comes to acceleration and growth at our College of the North Atlantic and finding opportunities of which we can accelerate those capabilities. As well as the Regional Innovation Systems pilot projects where we will be placing focus on tourism and fisheries, as well as agriculture and forestry, the industrial activity that's taking place on the Burin Peninsula, the Argentia area and the Clarenville area, as well as defence and aerospace with Gander, as well as the ocean tech sector on the Avalon Peninsula.

I'd be remiss if I didn't talk about the accolades that are happening. We've gotten almost \$3 million in value from PR that's circulated from the *Come From Away* that's happening in New York City that's been acclaimed, nominated for a number of Tony awards – seven, as well as other awards recently today. It's quite exciting to see that the community, Gander, the Chamber of Commerce and working with the Department of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation and with the airport, that we're hosting opportunities management sessions so that there can be a way in which the operators there and the community can be prepared during the tourism season for people who are coming to have that experience based on the *Come From Away*, as well as there are already packages and lots of things happening. There are great things happening.

Since we are talking about the Social Services Committee, I want to really put forward the context of where we were, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Mount Pearl North on numerous references has talked about the unsustainability of the health care system in Newfoundland and

Labrador, despite the fact that it was his government that chose instead to just throw money at problems and hope for solutions, instead of using the increased revenue from the oil royalties to strategically plan to improve health care in the province.

The Minister of Health and Community Services has made some important changes that have happened right now when it comes to how health care services and the delivery are taking place. We're really working hard to find better ways to deliver best value when it comes to community-led health care teams that are happening throughout the province. Primary care teams are important.

According to a report that was released by the Canadian Institute for Health Information, in 2013 Newfoundland and Labrador spent more per person on health care than any other province at \$7,132 per person. That spending happened under the previous administration when they had huge oil royalties. The same year, Quebec and BC had the lowest health care expenditures per person at \$5,531 and \$5,775 respectively. This means that Newfoundland and Labrador spent 22 per cent higher than Quebec per person on health care in 2013 and 19 per cent higher than Ontario per person on health care in 2013.

It's ironic that the Member opposite keeps bringing up how Ontario is doing things better, yet when he was minister of Health and deputy premier of this province he chose not to take those actions, he chose not to move things forward, and continue that spend, spend, spend approach to have the highest per capita spending without having better outcomes for people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

This is why our government, led by the Premier of the province when he launched *The Way Forward*, said we're going to take a health-care lens; we're going to have health in all policies because we need to have a healthy population. When we look at the implementations of policies, programs and services, we should have that lens around health care and how we're going to be able to continue to offer health care very sustainably and have that population here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The provincial and territorial government's health care expenditures are just growing under the previous administration, and it's quite appalling. For the Member opposite, the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune, to get up and talk about things that are not factual is something that I'm not going to stand for, and that's why I felt compelled to get up today.

As well, I want to correct – and I really want to say you really lose credibility when you start throwing out inaccurate figures. For the Member opposite, the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune, to talk about Marble Mountain and the free skiing weekend to cost the taxpayers \$50,000; completely inaccurate, completely false, wrong.

I don't know where she got that number. Did she pull it out of thin air? I'd love to see where that number came from because what I can tell you about the ski weekend at Marble Mountain, that there were 3,500 ski visits over that weekend; 2,150 season pass holders came out; and 1,350 people that did not have a lift pass came out. There was \$31,000-plus in revenue generated from a ski weekend that was free because \$31,000 –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MITCHELMORE: You look at revenue that was generated from food and beverage, from our accommodations and from other services whether it be the high-end rentals. There was a cost to hosting that event, around \$40,000, so a \$10,000 overall net cost to operations, but the value of the marketing that took place, the impact of \$10,000 is the equivalent of keeping 14 season pass holders or attracting 14 season pass holders. Of that 3,500 people, we just need 14 people to buy season pass holders to make up that \$10,000 cost.

If you look at the spinoff to the economy, the overall economy, it's significant. Hotels saw a boost in the region. We saw the mayor of Corner Brook out talking about all the people that are shopping at the malls during that weekend; the amount of people that are in around the region, the spin off, the amount of gas, the amount of consumable activity that's taken place, when you look at that activity that's significant.

I want to talk about what we've done at Marble Mountain. We've been able to cut the operational budget at Marble Mountain by over \$90,000. We cut the capital operations by \$50,000. What did they do, Mr. Speaker? What did they do? They made sure when they had Marble Mountain that they didn't have other assets including their lift insured to the capacity that it cost the taxpayers \$4.6 million to replace that lift that was struck by lightning. That was what happened by them and their administration, not good governance, not good due diligence, that happened under their watch.

Also, what happened under their watch is that the Pippy Park Commission, which is a public golf course that's basically owned by the people of the province, the CA Pippy Park Commission employs a lot less people, fewer people, 75 people and a campground – \$606,000 under their watch when it comes to their taxpayer subsidy. Where is it today? It's under \$400,000 because we've been able to challenge the CA Pippy Park Commission to increase their revenues and to not be reliant on the taxpayer of Newfoundland and Labrador. We are challenging our agencies, boards and commissions to be more responsible with the taxpayer money. That is key.

I see my time has expired. I have so much more that I want to say. If the Opposition would grant me leave, I could go on all day.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Bragg): Order, please!

The Speaker recognizes the Member for St. John's Centre.

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

I'm very happy to stand and to speak to Concurrence for the Social Services department. I'd also like to acknowledge the family for – the Member for Mount Pearl North whose children are here in the House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. ROGERS: I would hope that perhaps every Member here in this House might keep that in mind as I stand and speak. I'm sure they're very, very proud of their father and they're very happy to be here and to see their father at work.

Mr. Speaker, I've spoken a few times so far on the budget, and one of the messages I would like to really speak to once again is that budgets are about visions. It's not about line by line; it's not about zero-based budgeting. It's about what is the vision. What is the vision that government has for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador? How do they see weathering this current economic storm that we're all experiencing? How do they see strengthening our individuals, strengthening our people, strengthening our communities, strengthening our economies? How do they see that?

Then one would think that every measure in the budget, every decision in the budget should be guided by that goal and that mandate, and it should also be guided by policy. It's not just about numbers, it's about policy. I would like to think that's exactly how this budget was construed, but there's no evidence of that, Mr. Speaker.

Another thing is one would think that government would want their budget to be successful. So how would you measure that success? I would think there are a number of ways of measuring that success. Among them is looking at, for instance, budget '16-'17, which was the Liberal government's first budget. You would think that they would take a look at that budget and make an analysis and say, okay, was our budget successful? Did it empower our people? Did it strengthen our people? Did it strengthen our communities? Did it strengthen our province? Are we any better off now than we were before budget '16-'17?

I'm not so sure, and if not, then this current budget should mitigate any damage that was done by the last budget. Then, again, every decision in this budget should be about strengthening our people, strengthening our communities, strengthening our province. How do we do that? We make sure that people are well educated. We make sure that people have

what they need in order to be able to thrive. Not just to subsist, but to thrive.

So that people have everything they need to be the best they possibly could be. That everybody has what they need in order to be able to fully participate in our communities, fully participate in growing our economy. Growing our economy doesn't mean it has to be great big megaprojects, but growing our economy so that people have what they need in order to thrive, to live well. That's the measures we should be looking at when we assess and analyze a budget.

I have asked a number of times – for budget '16-'17, I asked if there was a gender lens applied. Well, we know there wasn't, because I ATIPPED that and there was absolutely no proof whatsoever that any kind of gender lens was applied to the budgetary process of '16-'17.

The Minister of Finance has assured us that has happened for budget '17-'18. We still haven't seen any proof of it, so we're going to have to go on her word. I've asked for a report, or documentation to show what kind of analysis was done and what was the outcome of that analysis. So far we haven't seen that.

The other lens one would want to use in determining whether or not a budget falls in line with a policy that different departments have established – and let's also remember that every department had a mandate letter from the Premier instructing each minister what they should be doing, what they should be accomplishing as minister of that specific department. One would think the budget should reflect that. That is another lens or another measuring tool that could be used to say, okay, were these budget decisions in line with the mandate the Premier gave to each minister and were these budget decisions in line with policies, not just about money.

Let's keep in mind this is not a budget for a household. This is a budget to run our province, and we have goals and objectives for our province. So that's what constantly needs to be done, analyzing what are the ramifications, what are the rollout effects of the past budget. Then for this budget, how do we mitigate any of those negative effects and how do we move forward

strengthening our people, strengthening our communities, strengthening our province.

Again, one of the things one would hope is that we have a growing unemployment problem. We've seen that government itself – this government in its own documents have said that we are going to be reaching 20 per cent unemployment in our province. That means one out of every five people who need to work, want to work, must work, will not have a job. That's a lot of people. That's an awful lot of people. We'll be the highest in the country. Way higher than the national average.

Is there anything in this budget that is gearing towards mitigating that? Because government has clearly said that is what's going to be happening. So we must believe that. I assume that there was no way they would inflate that number. As a matter of fact, that number may be a little bit under reported because we have people who have to leave because they can't find work.

Really, that's one of key issues. Does this budget in any way, shape or form address that growing problem? Because it is a huge problem. If we have a high unemployment rate, then the trickle-down effects of that are the needs for more social services to be able to ensure that people are able to thrive. Again, not just subsist but to thrive; to participate fully in their communities.

The other factor that we need to look at, another demographic shift, is the fact that we have the fastest growing demographic shift in terms of an aging population in the whole country. Are there decisions in this budget that are preparing us for that, preparing us for the services that are needed so that we can ensure – the senior population which again is becoming a larger proportion of our population, is there anything in this budget to address that? I haven't really found anything. I've been looking because I've been looking with that seniors' lens.

What I'd like to do now, Mr. Speaker, is let's look at: Is this budget responding to the current reality of the lives of the people in our province and also is this budget doing anything to improve not only the current situation but moving towards the future? What we see in the

future is a shifting demographic, aging, growing; incredibly growing unemployment. Basically, what's happened with this budget is that they're just based on a desperate prayer that the price of oil will go up because we haven't really seen anything else.

We hear the word "innovation" tossed around quite a bit. We don't hear hardly anything about community development. We don't really see much around community development in this at all. We hear the words tossed around about diversification, but this government now has been at it for two years, and you would think they would have something a little more concrete to offer the people of Newfoundland and Labrador right now, because that's what we need. In their first budget, they told us clearly, the Minister of Finance told us clearly everything was desperate, that we'd hit rock bottom, we're even going to go below rock bottom, but they really didn't give us anything, aside from the fact that she wanted us to reduce our deficit.

That, in and of itself, as a goal, really isn't much of a goal. Again, the goal should be to grow our province, to strengthen our people, to strengthen our communities, to strengthen our economy. That should be the goal, not just to reduce a deficit – although reducing deficits are important, but only if whatever measures are taken to reduce that deficit doesn't further create problems for the people of the province in order to be able to cope with these current economic times.

So when people talk about balancing a budget, what are you balancing? Are you just balancing numbers or are you balancing a give and take so that, in fact, we are seeing long-term benefits to the people of the province – because people are talking. We hear it all the time. It's anecdotal. We don't have that data yet. The statistics that we rely on – there's a lag in those statistics. I think now we're operating on statistics from 2014. Because of the economic downturn that started a few years ago, the statistics that we work with now really don't show the current reality how that downturn is affecting the lives of the people of the province.

There are a few different departments that are covered under Social Services. I'm just going to

touch on a few key points in each department because that's all there is to do right now; there's only enough time to be able to do that. For instance, in Education, we hear from teachers, we hear from administrators, we hear from students and we hear from parents that inclusion is one of the top issues in our education system right now. Inclusion, there have been inadequate resources assigned to ensure that inclusion can be properly addressed in our province, and we are seeing the rollout of that.

Nobody is served by the fact that we do not have the adequate resources to fully implement inclusion. Teachers aren't served.

Administration is not served. Students are not served, particularly any students with exceptionalities who need additional help so that inclusion can be actually addressed. I believe one of the most burning issues right now in our school system is the lack of resources to address inclusion in a way that addresses the human rights of our children, their right to full, equal education. Those resources have not been allocated and it's a huge problem.

I'm looking forward to the Premier's Advisory Task Force on Educational Outcomes because I'm sure that they're going to have a number of things to say about that. I was a member of the All-party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions and we were able to meet with the Premier's Task Force on Educational Outcomes and we talked very specifically about some of those issues. I look forward to hearing their report.

Another department that comes under Social Services is Children, Seniors and Social Development. There were some decisions made in this budget that really concerned me and I believe concern a number of people. Again, how were those decisions made? Where those decisions made in the best interest of the people or in this theoretical issue of we got to get the deficit down?

Again, I believe that there has been no analysis done in terms of if you cut something here in a program, really, what happens down the road in terms of extra costs, perhaps to other departments or to people, and that analysis has not been done. Because if it had been done,

people who are dealing with chronic mental health issues, they wouldn't have their bus passes cut.

People's home care hours, which is Health – and I know that the bus pass issue comes sometimes under Health, sometimes it comes under AES. But the ramifications for people to be able to live fully and healthy if they don't have affordable transportation and become further isolated, then the cost of that trickle down into the Health department because people end up with more hospitalization or trips to the emergency room. It affects their psychological and mental health and it also affects their physical health.

In Children, Seniors and Social Development, we see that there's been a cut of \$50,000 to inclusion and capacity building grants in the disability area. We are so far behind, our province, in terms of inclusion for people with physical disabilities. We are so far behind.

I believe the minister and her staff – I also want to be able to thank all the staff who met with us in Estimates, and they were very, very open with us. I believe their intention is to do the best they can with the money they have. I truly believe that, and I truly believe they are focused on the needs of the people, but I also feel that some of the cuts, particularly in the area of disability because we are so behind in services, supports and infrastructure for people with mobility impairments, et cetera, I don't understand the cuts there. They make no sense to me. If there weren't enough people applying for those grants then let's see why that is and see how we can make sure that every penny that is available gets into their hands.

One of the areas I feel really strongly about in Children, Seniors and Social Development is the area of child protection and services for families that a few years ago, in the past administration, they took prevention out of the mandate of child protection. I am hoping, because they said they were going to – the minister and her staff said they are focusing on prevention. They are focusing on more services, more comprehensive services for vulnerable families. I'm going to believe that. It will be interesting to see how that rolls out, but it's imperative. It's so important.

Again, without that, the cost to other departments increases, whether it be the justice system, the education system, the health care system. So I am hoping it's not just: well, wouldn't it be nice? But that we're actually going to see specific services to reinforce the need for direct services for vulnerable families. We have to cut down on the number of apprehensions that are being done through child protective services. The number of apprehensions has steadily grown over the past nine years. That has to be addressed. Hopefully, they are going to do that.

The other issue is the whole issue of our youth who transition into adult care. Some of our youth, the services that are provided to them out in the community are dropped once they reach 18 years of age. Now there are some services provided to them until they are 21, or maybe even a bit older as long as they are in school, but we have kids we are 18 years old, youth who are 18 years old who are not in any kind of educational program and whose support services are cut from them once they turn 18. They are so not ready for it.

We have, all of us, any of us who've had children or family members, know that a lot of our family members at the age of 18 are not ready to be out on their own. Then if you've had youth who've had a number of issues that have hampered their development, you know for sure they're not ready to be out on their own and abandoned at the age of 18. That's another issue that the minister and her staff assured us they're going to be looking at. We'll be holding them to that.

Housing: we were promised that there's a complete review of Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. That's a good thing. We still have a shortage of affordable housing, particularly for seniors, particularly for single people who are in receipt of Income Support. They are just totally pushed into poverty because of the high cost of housing. We need more rent supplements. We need more portable supplements for people so they can live in the communities that serve them best.

Mr. Speaker, I see that I'm running out of time here. I want to raise the issue, as well, of placements of seniors. When they have to go to

long-term care or a personal care home, they end up an hour or an hour-and-a-half drive from their families and how difficult that is, how detrimental that is to their health.

I also want to talk about the opioid crisis and the fentanyl crisis.

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: I see, Mr. Speaker, my time has run out, but I do look forward to speaking again later in debate.

Thank you very much.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to stand in this hon. House today. I wish to speak to *Budget 2017*. I wish to speak facts and not fallacies, Mr. Speaker.

The Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune indicated that she has not received the information from Estimates. When in actual fact, I passed her the binder from the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation after Estimates. The material she's referring to is a binder from CSSD.

Our Estimates were Thursday morning. This is Monday. So that would have given my staff two days to get all the information that she requested.

Mr. Speaker, in my department –

MS. PERRY: Point of order.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune.

MS. PERRY: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

We are still waiting on those binders. All the other ministers gave theirs at the end of the Estimates. So why are we waiting for two days?

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

There is no point of order.

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

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Speaker, the Member asked for extensive details around grants. There are millions of dollars of grants that come out of my department. She wanted millions – yes, millions of dollars in grants. She wanted a list of every single person, or every single group that received the grants. My staff are working to get all the information. I aim to provide every single bit of information that was asked for in Estimates, Mr. Speaker.

The investments in this year's budget speak to our government's continued commitment to enhancing the lives of the people of our province in a variety of ways: addressing poverty, violence and mental issues; enhancing education; working more collaboratively and effectively with Aboriginal communities – in actual fact, Mr. Speaker, myself and the Premier just met with the Aboriginal communities – improving inclusion of persons with disabilities, and enhancing the health care and wellness.

Providing enhanced service delivery to all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians at all stages of life is a priority for this government. *Budget 2017* reflects our commitment to a stronger, economic foundation, a more efficient public sector, better services, Mr. Speaker, and better outcome.

Community groups are important partners in our delivery of services to the people of the province. These organizations, Mr. Speaker, are often relied upon to deliver a number of critical services to individuals and the communities they support.

As a person who volunteered for a number of organizations, I can assure you that I understand the value of community groups. As a past executive director of the Newfoundland and Labrador Association for Community Living, I worked to navigate the system for many individuals with intellectual disabilities and their families. This organization, the Association for Community Living, for example, works

diligently to increase the awareness of the registered disability savings plan, and thus enabling individuals with disabilities to a financially secure future and decreasing poverty.

As you can see, we work alongside community groups to help decrease poverty in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. This is just one example of some of the great work this particular group is doing.

While we acknowledge there are pressures on some community groups, it's important to note that this budget, in this fiscal climate, ensures that core funding is maintained to community groups. There's no 12.5 per cent cut, Mr. Speaker, in this budget.

As we indicated in *The Way Forward*, our government remains committed to implementing a multi-year approach for community grant funding. Mr. Speaker, this is something that non-profit community groups have been asking for for years. We have heard from a number of community organizations that multi-year planning allows the organization to plan better for what resources they need. They have told us that by the time they are informed about funding decisions, they are often well into their year. For community organizations, this makes hiring for short term very, very difficult and it makes retention of good staff difficult, and it makes it difficult for planning and difficult to represent the people whom they advocate for, Mr. Speaker.

Having to apply for funding on an annual basis limits their ability to do long-term planning and it is very time consuming. I remember spending five full days myself, Mr. Speaker, five days, preparing a funding application when, in actual fact, multi-year funding would get rid of this and groups could continue to do their good work on behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Community groups tell us it would be beneficial to have this funding, not only for long- and short-term planning and continuity, but it also affects the leverage of other funds such as sponsors and federal organizations. Providing a degree of financial stability through multi-year funding contracts will allow community groups

to better focus their efforts on the delivery of essential services.

Mr. Speaker, the groups that are out there in the community on the ground are the people that deliver the essential services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: My constituents, Mr. Speaker, often ask me why I'm not responding to fake news, I guess, on social media. I say I don't respond to that because I prefer to put the facts out there, not to get into a he said, she said. We're here to represent the people of the province, to work for and on behalf of them, and that's what I wish to do.

My district, the District of Placentia – St. Mary's, is almost 4,000 kilometres in size. Roads are a very, very important issue in my district. We acknowledge that we do have issues with the condition of some of our roads. It is evident that they were not maintained. The Department of Transportation and Works is working to address these concerns. A significant amount of brush cutting has in fact been completed in the District of Placentia – St. Mary's.

This year, we will start addressing these concerns by pulverizing and repaving from St. Joseph's to Riverhead, Ferndale Road, Ship Harbour towards Fox Harbour and finishing Point Lance Road. And maintenance will, in fact, be carried out throughout the district and other areas that are causing concern.

The safety of residents is important to this government. We are investing in bridges, Mr. Speaker. We've replaced the South Dildo Bridge in the district. We're replacing the Rocky Island Pond Bridge on old Placentia highway near Colinet this year. I'm committed to improving road infrastructure throughout the district. This government is committed to improving it also. We are committed to maintaining the roads in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, the safety and protection of our vulnerable populations, such as children and youth, is an important focus for our government. It is our goal that the advancements made in

child protection will help ensure children and youth are receiving the best possible services.

We are continuing the ongoing work of building and revitalizing a child protection system that is responsive to the priority needs of our children and our youth, as well as continuing to make significant progress in creating a culture of accountability and consistency across all programs in all regions. The protection and the healthy development of our children are extremely important to the department and to the services we provide. This is why we are always and forever monitoring and assessing our services.

A review of the *Children and Youth Care and Protection Act* was completed this year. We know that child protection is a critical and challenging area of service delivery. Every day child protection social workers in our province work to assess the safety of children and make decisions, Mr. Speaker, to ensure their protection. That is why we are proceeding with the development and implementation of a new decision-making model for the protective intervention program to replace the current risk management decision-making model.

This, Mr. Speaker, is a fact; this is where we are investing money. It will modernize our approach to child protection decision making and provide staff with the most up-to-date and efficient tools available to support their professional judgment. An investment of over \$300,000 towards implementation of the structured decision-making model and to begin training for staff is allocated in *Budget 2017* – fact, Mr. Speaker.

As I said earlier, our government is committed to enhancing the lives of the people of our province. Improving the health and well-being of the people of this province is a large component of this commitment. We have established targets to increase physical activity rates by 7 per cent and reduce obesity rates by 5 per cent by 2025. We have a plan, Mr. Speaker.

As outlined in *The Way Forward*, our success in Newfoundland and Labrador by 2025 will be measured by additional targets such as we aim to increase breastfeeding initiation by 7 per cent. We have objectives, we have goals and we're working towards them. We aim to decrease the

smoking rate by 4 per cent, to increase the rate of vegetable and fruit consumption by 5 per cent. That one, Mr. Speaker, in Newfoundland and Labrador no doubt is going to be a challenge.

We will increase awareness, we will introduce policies, practices and programs and we will create environments which support healthy, active living, starting with our schools and our communities. Mr. Speaker, our healthy living action plan that we are developing will support a health-in-all-policies approach and it will require working together with our schools, our communities, our community groups, our health, recreation, sports, various other departments, working with community, working with interested and invested groups, that is what our government is doing. That is what we do every single day.

Protecting people, particularly children and youth, from the proven health risks of tobacco use is a key part of the commitment to better health outcomes. Smoking cessation is a large component of our efforts. Budget 2017-18 includes continued support of more than \$300,000 to the Newfoundland and Labrador Lung Association for the Smokers' Helpline; \$300,000, that's fact, not a fallacy. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, we will continue to support healthy living initiatives through a number of investments which we know will have very much a positive impact on the people we serve.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2017-18 will continue to invest in the Community Healthy Living Fund; \$1.79 million, including sport and recreation facilities and infrastructure – another fact, Mr. Speaker. Competition has been shown to increase participation rates across certain youth populations, so this year's budget commits over \$570,000 to support development and initiatives and travel for sport – another fact, Mr. Speaker.

Additionally, we have seen that we are more than capable of competing nationally and internationally, so we are committing \$681,000 to support the Canada Games teams and other high-performance athletes – another fact, Mr. Speaker. One look at the performance of athletes from this province over the past year certainly speaks volumes of this investment.

It is important that all of our province's youth have the opportunity to participate in sport competitions. In particular, we appreciate the costs associated with travelling from Labrador to the Island, and we have committed \$730,000 to the Labrador travel subsidy for championships that are on the Island portion of the province – another fact, Mr. Speaker.

Wellness also encompasses more than activity; eating is an important component of healthy living. That is why we are committing \$1.29 million to healthy eating, supporting groups such as Kids Eat Smart, Food First NL and the School Lunch Association. Mr. Speaker, our government continues to work with the Community of Persons with Disabilities and all residents to move forward on our commitment to become an inclusive province.

Mr. Speaker, in our budget this year, through the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, there was an investment of \$500,000 and \$500,000 last year; that's a total of a million dollars for the investment in student assistants. As a parent, I can assure you I understand the value of student assistants in the school system. We're listening to the population. We are listening to the schools. We understand there are more resources needed, but we are investing \$1 million in two years for student assistants.

We know citizens of our province still experience barriers on a daily basis, barriers that exclude people from taking part in their communities, from employment opportunities and even from public services. We maintain our commitment to reviewing existing legislation in order to remove barriers and ensure residents have equitable access to opportunities and services.

Everything I have listed here so far are facts in the provincial budget.

A total of \$400,000 has been invested in *Budget 2017* for capacity and inclusion grants to advance inclusion through items such as new resources in training and improving accessibility. We understand there's a need for improved accessibility and we are working towards that.

Our government recognizes that transportation is also essential to participation and inclusion in society. That is why *Budget 2017* includes an investment of \$400,000 to ensure that people with disabilities can access transportation and can participate in their communities – another fact, Mr. Speaker.

Participation at all levels is important to us as a government.

AN HON. MEMBER: No fake news here.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: No fake news.

Including increased physical activity opportunities for persons with disability. We have continued our investment of \$150,000 this fiscal year for recreation and sport development initiatives for persons with disabilities.

Our government understands that safe, stable and affordable housing is fundamental to the social and economic well-being of individuals, families and communities. *Budget 2017* has provided significant investments to help Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation continue providing support and housing options for vulnerable populations and to help address homelessness throughout our province.

There are a number of programs designed to assist persons with disabilities, persons with complex needs, seniors and families with low income, as well as address homelessness throughout the province.

Building Forward, Mr. Speaker, is another fact, a strategic framework that will guide priority infrastructure investments throughout Newfoundland and Labrador over the next five years. Building Forward is an indication of a plan. We have a plan.

This framework delivers on our government's commitment to release a multi-year infrastructure plan that balances fiscal reality with the need to address infrastructure priorities. Over the past year, we have been successful in leveraging federal cost-shared funding through strong working relationships with the federal government.

For those listening at home, I just want to emphasize what I just said: Strong working relationships with the federal government. A good provincial-federal relationship is extremely important to leverage funding.

As part of the multi-year planning process, Building Forward allows our government to seek every opportunity to leverage federal infrastructure funding to support provincial priorities and to maximize investments while balancing fiscal responsibility. I understand if you cannot leverage funding you're going to have difficulty delivering programs, but, Mr. Speaker, we have capacity and we have the relationship to leverage funding.

In 2016, the province and the federal government announced a \$48.9 million social infrastructure fund for improved social and affordable housing in Newfoundland and Labrador. This investment of \$34.6 million from the federal government –

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: It is \$34.6 million from the federal government, and \$14.3 million from the provincial government over the next two years will help the people of Newfoundland and Labrador access sustainable and affordable housing.

This \$48.9 million investment, Mr. Speaker, includes \$28.7 million as part of the commitment to double funding levels under the existing 2014-2019 \$68 million investment in affordable housing. It includes \$11.2 million to help address the increasing demand for repairs, as social housing units do age, Mr. Speaker, and it's to improve energy and efficiency, which in turn will help ensure long-term sustainability. Approximately 80 communities throughout this province, 80 communities, will see repairs to over 1,500 social housing units.

Mr. Speaker, this is all a result of our good working relationship with the federal government. Our government is committed to focussing on the increased needs of seniors; \$5.7 million will support the construction, repair and adaption of affordable housing for seniors. The funding will increase both the affordability and the availability of housing options throughout

the province, providing improved opportunities for seniors to age in place – another fact, Mr. Speaker.

Approximately \$3.3 million will support the development of increased shelters for victims of violence and provide health and safety upgrades to various transition houses throughout the province. We have been working and we continue to work in partnership with the Transition House Association of Newfoundland and Labrador to identify how best to allocate these funds.

Mr. Speaker, we are working with the organizations in the community. We have a good working relationship with the federal government, and we are leveraging funding.

It is estimated, Mr. Speaker, that over 450 jobs could be created province-wide through these investments – over 450 jobs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Speaker, I see I'm running out of time.

One more thing; in 2017-18, the provincial investment for social and affordable housing included \$10.2 million for maintenance; \$3.6 million to modernize and renovate; \$2.7 million to leverage federal funding.

Mr. Speaker, it goes on. These numbers that I'm putting out is not fake news, it's not fallacy. It is facts that are in the provincial budget as a result of our relationship with the federal government leveraging funding and investing in the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

It's a pleasure to get up today and speak on our budget in Concurrence. Listening to the back

and forth and the debates back and forth, it's always good.

Mr. Speaker, there are still a lot of comments from Members opposite. I won't say everything you hear is accurate. I won't say it's not, but –

AN HON. MEMBER: It's not the truth.

MR. PETTEN: Yeah. A lot of it is prepared, a lot of it is their message they're trying to get out to people.

You can never go wrong if you invest in the people. It's fine to say you're investing. Everyone talks dollars and cents and the money previous administrations wasted and whatnot, which we beg to differ on that.

My colleague for Conception Bay East – Bell Island made a good case of that last week on a lot of great investments we made.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. PETTEN: A lot of great investments we made over the last 12 years prior to this current administration.

A lot of the investments we made over those 12 years were for the people, it was about people. It was investing in the people. It was investing in the infrastructure, investing in our province as a whole, but by doing that you gave people extra confidence.

I've said this before and I'll say it again because it's the only word that really resonates, makes sense I think and people understand it. We found a bounce in our step. We became very proud as a people. To this day we are still. I think a lot of that pride is still there but it is somewhat suppressed. There is a lot of stress out in today's world trying to make ends meet with a lot of middle-class families.

My main message, if you want to call it a message, of what I hear on the street when I talk to people, because I say it over and over again when I get up to speak. It's what I hear when I talk to people on the street. That's not a bluff word, that's honest. When I go anywhere out in

public and I run into people, they want to chat with you and I like to hear what they have to say and I genuinely listen.

Most people I talk to share a lot of similar concerns. They don't know – they're struggling to make ends meet; they wonder where our future is.

I guess the message that I'd like to relay on their behalf to the current government: They'd like government to govern, make decisions which will help seniors, youth and middle class. If you did all those things or made an honest effort or made some headway with it, a lot of that background noise that we hear out on the streets today would be somewhat – not eliminated, you'll never eliminate it, but it would be a lot less.

That's what people are looking for, Mr. Speaker. They're looking for a clear direction and vision. They're looking for a government that's going to lead them to the brighter tomorrow that we were all offered.

I said this before and I think it requires repeating. The gloom and doom that we talk about and we hear about – and we hear a lot of it from Members opposite as a result of what the former administration did, what they're have to deal with. When you look at three weeks after the general election you put a black cloud over this province, it deserves repeating over and over again, that's the black cloud that everyone to this day is living under.

Members opposite can say what they want but that is the actual fact, you're living under a dark cloud day to day. People don't know where the future is; people don't know what tomorrow brings. The taxes are still there. We still have 300 new taxes and fees. One is reduced, but it's still 300. It's not 299; it's 300, maybe 299½.

People expected better. I think we all kind of anticipated something better. No one knew for sure what they were getting, but they did expect and wanted something better. Of course, unfortunately, what we're dealing with today is what it is and people are struggling.

The saying goes you can't tax yourself to prosperity, Mr. Speaker. I think somewhere

along the way that's where this current administration lost their way in thinking that was the answer. Once that seed is planted, it's going to be hard to turn the public opinion around to see any sense of what they've been put through for two years.

People are leaving this province. Our economy is suffering. I know in my district – which is second-largest municipality in the province – I have a lot of contractors and a lot of small-business owners. I have a couple of businesses that steadily show revenue increasing; one of them is Tim Hortons. They've actually flatlined. Their actual business has flatlined. I know when you drive by, you'd never say it. But actually for their spending at Tim Hortons – and this person is a pretty credible guy. He said to me he's flatlined as a result of the budget. Actually, as a matter of fact, he said it's a direct result of the gas tax.

We just had a reduction in the gas tax. It's still there in the most recent budget, but what you see in the reduction there now of 8½ plus HST –

AN HON. MEMBER: Not until June.

MR. PETTEN: And not until June – eventually, it's supposed to go to another 4 cents in December. What you have coming up there, there's going to be a portion that, I think, will be our new carbon tax, carbon pricing. I spoke about that many times here in this House. Whatever way you cut it, it's a new tax. There's no other way around it; it's another tax. So we'll have 301 taxes – not 300, it will be 301.

That's not something I think the people are looking forward to. When it happens, it's like everything, it won't become reality until they go to the gas station or they read on the news that's the new tax. That's when reality kicks in. It's like, oh my, we have another new tax. We can say it all we want, it can be out in the media, it can be out in the public domain but until it actually hits people's pocketbooks it doesn't resonate.

So that's a reality that's coming and that will be a new tax on top of the existing taxes. We're not heading in the right direction. Every time you listen to Members opposite, they try to carve out that piece of good news that was in the budget,

or good-news announcement. And there have been some good-news announcements. But for every good-news announcement, you're hearing three or four pieces of bad news or a controversy, or a scandal or uncertainty, or what was said one day is not accurately was said the next day.

That's not what people need to hear. That's not what the public are looking for. Again, the public are looking for a government that is governing, they are looking out for the best interests of the people, they emit confidence, people feel good about some of the decisions that are made – it brings the bounce back in their steps, Mr. Speaker. Right now, there's not a lot of bounce in people's steps.

Mr. Speaker, I got a note made. Again, I wanted to just bring it up because I felt I should say it. When I spoke last week, I spoke of lady that lives in my colleague for Topsail – Paradise's district – I've dealt a lot with her on her dental issues. She's been in the media somewhat of late and protests. Me and my colleague, both of us have gone to bat for her and trying to get her the help she needs. It's a \$20,000 surgery that's required to get the implants. Right now, as I stated, she was eating pureed food.

The Member for Bonavista actually got up in this House, and fair enough, he said, because of my own inefficiencies, for me to tell this lady to contact him or his CA and they would look after getting her dentures. Now, with the utmost respect, if that's the way things are operating across the way, I think we're in a sad state of affairs.

I've gone to the Minister of Health's office. I know there are policy issues and they are working in a way to try to find some solution, but for any Member in this House to get up and flippantly make that remark, it's disingenuous to this lady. It's disrespectful to this lady. She's out fighting and we're trying to help her cause. We understand it's complicated, but show some compassion.

We're not talking about a \$500 hosting grant. We're talking about someone's life who is eating food that is being pureed. She's sincerely concerned. She's fighting the cause and we're trying to help her. So to say for us to contact the

Member for Bonavista's office and he'll look after, I beg to differ.

Mr. Speaker, on another note, I know the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Innovation – I have trouble with the name, but anyway, he was just up speaking a little while earlier. Another favorite topic of mine has been Marble Mountain and the free-for-all, the ski-a-thon, I guess, they had in Corner Brook. The Member for Corner Brook was out promoting, giving away free ski passes and lifts. They were all out on the hill and shaking hands.

I guess they were on the cash box because, like I said the other day, I can't figure it out. Sunday evening they knew exactly how much money came in and went out. So I guess things are different now, but I never heard tell of it before. Anyway, they had a great weekend and they spent at a cost of \$33,000 to the taxpayers. All the while, these people, like I said, are waiting for their dentures. The minister gets up today and he alludes to the fact that it was great. They took in \$31,000. He had 14 new skiers signed up.

Mr. Speaker, it's not about skiers. Marble Mountain has had challenges for years and years and years, even from the good years. Marble Mountain is a struggle until you developed the base of that hill. We knew when were there, and this government knows as well, it's a struggle. Ski hills historically, if you go across the country, it's a struggle to keep ski hills profitable unless you develop a base and turn it into a year-round operation. Zip lining out there brings in some revenue, sure, there's something based, but there's a bigger evolution that needs to happen at Marble Mountain before it can become profitable.

I'd like nothing better than for skiing to make that break even, but it's not. Then for the Member opposite to get up and backtrack after three or four days earlier when they announced to give a free ski-athon at Marble Mountain. He backed up the board: they made the right decision, it was the right decision. It wasn't feasible to stay open. Then three or four days later he fired them, and said: no, it's free skiing for everyone in Corner Brook, free skiing for everyone in the province, get out there.

Then he gets up today, and I found this a little bit concerning to me, Mr. Speaker. He tried to draw references of comparisons to Pippy Park and Marble Mountain. I know there are Members opposite, and Members in this Legislature and people around, maybe he should do a bit of homework and understand what Pippy Park is. It's not just a golf course.

Pippy Park has been around for something like 40 or 50 years. It was established to be a land bank probably somewhere – where Confederation Building is, the Health Sciences, the university; this is all Pippy Park grounds. If you go up on Mt. Scio Road, it's a centrepiece. The land this building sits on is Pippy Park land. It was donated by the Pippys. It's a very important part of our city; it's the centerpiece of the city.

As a matter of fact, it's three times the size of Stanley Park and 10 times the size of Montreal's Mount Royal Park. It's a part of who we are. It's the fabric of who we are, and for the minister to get up and compare Pippy Park to a ski hill – no disrespect to Marble Mountain, any ski hill that was at one time private – it's disingenuous, Mr. Speaker.

We have natural areas in Pippy Park. You go around Kent Pond – maybe some Members opposite, the minister included if he doesn't understand, I don't know all there is to know about Pippy Park. I have a fair grasp on it, though, and that comparison is just not fair. Like I said, it's disingenuous.

I know you have colleagues opposite – a couple of colleagues, I think, are representatives of part of Pippy Park. It's in their districts. So maybe he should talk to them because what I heard today was almost like: out with Pippy Park; forget Pippy Park. You can't compare the two, it is not comparable.

Maybe the minister should be comparing Marble Mountain and White Hills. Maybe he should talk to his colleague from Terra Nova who was out defending the free ski weekend at Marble Mountain; all the while his own people in White Hills were questioning why they aren't getting the same deal, but he didn't talk to his own people. He was in here beating the drum and talking to the media about Marble Mountain.

If they want to go comparing the two, compare White Hills to Marble Mountain. Don't bring Pippy Park into it. I think it's totally disingenuous. It's not fair, and I think it just shows their lack of understanding of what Pippy Park really is about.

Mr. Speaker, a couple of other notes in my last few minutes that I wanted to discuss. Another one I brought up many times – and now we're getting into the construction season – is the roads list. The Minister of Transportation and Works has stated he wants to take the politics out of paving, which is fair enough, and he's provided a list of roads that are getting done and the associated scores. That's fine as well. I've never publicly said any other than I thought it was – I had no issue with that and I've always seen merits in that, but I don't understand why we can't see the entire list.

No matter if you're on the bottom of that list, see the list so people can go and see where the road and the rates, when they can realistically anticipate any work to be done with those roads. I don't see anything wrong with that. It's a full comprehensive five-year roads list and associated scores.

I know the minister says it boxes him in, and I understand that to a certain degree if the roads are tendered. These roads are not tendered. They're a list. They can be subject to change should anything else happen. I've stated this numerous times and I'll continue to state it. I don't see why we can't see, all Members in this House, any provincial road in your district, why you can't see where it rates on the list. You get an idea.

One comparison to that is in my own district there was – we've moved past this stage now, but I know some years back there was a big demand for water and sewer in the district, a huge issue. Everyone wanted their road done. There was a lot of public outcry. The council of the day were under immense pressure. So they brought in cost recovery, and associated with cost recovery they brought in a priority list. Immediately, you could see that year five, year four, year three, whatever phase you were in, that's when you were getting your water and sewer work done, subject to change.

You would not believe, when that was brought in, I guess the anxiety or the people just knowing. Information can be dangerous but information is what solves a lot of problems. Communication, provide the information to the people. That was a prime example.

When they provided these priority lists in consultation with Municipal Affairs, the anxiety and the concerns and the public outcry started to die down. I know I'm getting my water and sewer in five years' time, four years, six years. To this day, it's almost to its final phase there now. I think we're in the last phase. It actually worked.

Right now we hear it, as MHAs, we're always arguing and complaining, we want to see where our roads fall on the list. We want pavement. Everyone looks for asphalt during the paving season for the roads in their district. That's what we do. We advocate and try to get improvements in our area.

I don't think for a second what we're asking for, what I've lobbied for and we've continuously asked for is a bad thing. I think it's a fair question for each and every one of us in this House. It's not just for me; it's all the Members opposite. A lot of the Members opposite in rural area, most all of their roads are provincial roads. Most of us on the Northeast Avalon, with the exception of my colleague for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune, and my other colleague for Ferryland, we only have probably two main roads that run through our districts that are provincial roads. Our towns are bigger, our municipalities, they can weather the storm of provincial or town roads.

I know in particular in CBS that's the case. But it's an issue that I think it's a valid argument and it's one that I've continued to call for and I have requested from the minister on many occasions, because I believe in it. I think it makes a lot of sense. Maybe it would save the minister a lot of grief down the road if he were to provide that list then you could say okay, I know I'm not getting anything until 2018. There is room on the existing list, because you've got percentages of it announced, and there's still room there to add on.

I understand the 2019 to have an extra bit of room, it's an election year. I wonder sometimes the benefit of that. That's a million-dollar question – not pun intended – on the benefit of pavement of the old roads during an election. But so be it.

My point is the room there they had to add a lot of these roads on – and people ask that question. Like this past year, we had the potholes to the point that I used to go into the local coffee and that became the conversation. So my answer to the people was I get it, I hear you loud and clear, but I drive same roads as you drive. I got the same concern as you. I've got daughters that drive these roads; we're all concerned. We're hitting the potholes; we've got blowouts. I know my two have had several.

I hear you loud and clear, and we are lobbying. I want to see the road improved just like you do; we all do. But a clear, clean precise list of the five-year roads plan, with the scores, I can look at those people and say, you're getting the road done in 2019, 2020, or 2018. Right now, it's only the list of the roads that they're doing that we see. We don't see the other roads on that list that are yet to be scored. Even though we know they're scored, they're just not providing it to us, to the public, and I call upon government to do that.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll reference to the Member opposite. There are 1,500 roads at a value of a billion dollars that's on the book, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HAWKINS: That certainly for us, if they actually –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I understand the minister has spoken to this motion.

MR. HAWKINS: Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I would say, in his limited time, he did make a good point.

At this time, I would move, seconded by the Minister of Municipal Affairs, that the House do now adjourn.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is that the House do now adjourn.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 in the afternoon.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Tuesday, at 1:30 p.m.