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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.

MR. SPEAKER: We would like to welcome to the public gallery Mr. Barry Fitzgerald, who will be the subject of a Ministerial Statement today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: For Members' statements today we have the Members for the Districts of Exploits, Baie Verte – Green Bay, Torngat Mountains, Bonavista, Burin – Grand Bank, and Terra Nova.

The hon. the Member for the District of Exploits.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DEAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the 50th anniversary of the Bishop's Falls Public Library, and the important work done by all public libraries in the District of Exploits. The library in Bishop's Falls, as well as the Botwood Kinsmen Public Library, the Norris Arm Public Library, the Point Leamington Public Library, and the Harmsworth Public Library located in the neighbouring district of Grand Falls - Windsor – Buchans, all provide countless benefits to the people of my district and surrounding areas.

In addition to providing books and promoting literacy, these public libraries, and libraries right across Newfoundland and Labrador, offer services such as free Internet access and computer training, story time, seasonal programs for children, and information sessions on topics ranging from taxes and money management, to gardening and Internet safety.

Libraries are dynamic, accessible community centres, and form an integral part of our society. Libraries are places for people to come together, crack open a good book, and share in the love of reading.

I ask all hon. Members to join me today in congratulating the Bishop's Falls Public Library on this their 50th anniversary, and in recognizing the vital role played by all public libraries throughout the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Baie Verte – Green Bay.

MR. WARR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House to commend two exemplary residents of Springdale. In 2010, Roy and Sherry Clarke in partnership with five Dominican friends set out to improve the lives of school children in the Dominican Republic.

They founded United for Kids, with the mandate of enabling Dominican children not only to start school on the right foot, but to remain in school.

Since they founded the charity, the Clarkes host various fundraisers throughout the year with the help of their family and friends, and members of the community. The money they raise improves the overall health and well-being of Dominican children by supporting dental care programs, providing essential vitamins and rendering assistance in medical emergencies. The foundation now helps approximately 170 kids in four different schools.

In 2016, the Clarkes fulfilled a lifelong dream and opened a preschool in the Dominican Republic. The school, called Bea's Preschool, has a qualified teacher and provides a free breakfast program. The Clarkes believe education is vital for breaking the cycle of poverty.

I ask all Members to join me in thanking the United for Kids Foundation for its commitment to making a difference in the lives of impoverished children.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to recognize an exceptional young woman from Labrador who was recently called to the bar in our province.

Elizabeth Zarpa, whose family hails from Nunatsiavut, showcased a deep connection to her indigenous culture during the swearing-in ceremony on April 21 by wearing a traditional Silapak to the event in St. John's.

Elizabeth studied law at the University of Victoria and articulated in Labrador. She wore the traditional garment after seeing other indigenous people from other provinces do it when they were called to the bar. We believe she is the first Inuk to ever do it in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, Elizabeth Zarpa represents a new attitude among indigenous young people, who now more than ever, believe that all things are possible and dreaming of a career in any field, including the law, is open to them.

As for wearing the Silapak at the ceremony, Elizabeth said she wanted to let people know she was proud of where she came from and proud of her heritage.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating Elizabeth Zarpa on her success and we wish her well in her legal pursuits.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KING: Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to stand here today and recognize all the volunteers in the District of Bonavista. Coming on the heels of National Volunteer Week, I feel it important to acknowledge those who give their time to make our region a better place.

Volunteerism is the heart of every community and without volunteers many of the great things that take place would fall by the wayside. As my colleagues here in the House can attest from

their own districts, those who volunteer do so without asking anything in return. They do so out of a sense of duty, a sense of community. It is often said that after you volunteer once, you're hooked for life. That is certainly true for my district where we have several volunteers with over 50 years of doing what they love to do, giving their time.

On Friday, April 28, the ninth annual regional Volunteer Appreciation Night was held at The Factory in Port Union. With well over 100 people present, attendees were treated to musical performances, food and refreshment, door prizes and a wonderful speech/performance by Volunteer Week Honorary Chair Pete Soucy.

To those who truly make a difference, I say thank you!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for the District of Burin – Grand Bank.

MS. HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Chief Petty Officer Travis Perrot of RCSCC 269 Endeavour in St. Lawrence. Travis learned recently he will be taking part in a cultural exchange in Hong Kong for two weeks this summer.

Travis has been involved with his corps for the past six years and has taken part in extensive training programs and numerous trips. Being chosen for such an adventure, the only cadet from Atlantic Canada who will be participating, Mr. Speaker, is an indication of the high regard in which Travis is held.

Exchanges and visits like the one Travis will participate in do much to broaden the world perspective for our youth, Mr. Speaker.

Travis is the son of proud parents Mario and Kanta Perrot of St. Lawrence.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members to join me in congratulating Travis on being chosen for this cultural exchange. I know he will represent the province well during his time in Hong Kong.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HOLLOWAY: Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I rise in this hon. House and recognize the members and volunteers of Branch 027 of the Royal Canadian Legion.

On April 29, I had the distinct privilege of attending this year's honour and awards celebration. Several members received pins and medals for their long years of dedicated service including: Ralph Froude, Marvela Sargent, Glen Sargent, five years; Beverly Lundrigan, 15 years; Barry Moores, 20 years; Dave Gullage, 25 years; Jean Burden, 30 years; Gordon Bursley, 50 years.

In addition, Legionnaire of the Year Award went to Wesley Stringer and the Executive Medal and Service Bar was given to Cy McGettigan. Mr. Daniel Seaward received the Certificate of Merit for his actions which led to saving the life of an individual during a Legion-held event.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating the members and volunteers of Branch 027 for continuing to promote the interests and benefits of veterans and those who have served this province and country with pride and dignity.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in this hon. House today to recognize Barry Fitzgerald, Senior Manager of Corporate Safety with the Department of Transportation and Works, who has been selected as a judge for this year's Canada's Safest Employers Awards.

The awards recognize companies from all across Canada's with outstanding accomplishments in promoting the health and safety of their workers.

Awards will be presented in the fall in a wide range of categories with organizations judged on health and safety criteria such as employee training, incident investigation and emergency preparedness.

Mr. Fitzgerald has been with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador for over three years and supports Transportation and Works employees at all levels as they fulfill their safety responsibilities.

Mr. Speaker, it is great honour for Mr. Fitzgerald to be selected as a judge.

There is no greater priority than the safety of our employees and the travelling public. The department is working to build a strong environment of workplace safety that is squarely focused on safety first. We have made gains by improving and updating procedures and policies. We are also taking advantage of North American Occupational Safety and Health Week to raise awareness by holding special activities with staff.

With approximately 1,700 employees who daily work in challenging environments, we are constantly seeking new opportunities to improve and enhance a culture of safety.

I ask my hon. colleagues to join me in congratulating Mr. Fitzgerald and to recognize our dedicated employees who work diligently every day to ensure safety for everyone in 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, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. On behalf of my colleagues on this side of the House, I wish to congratulate Mr.

Barry Fitzgerald as being chosen as a judge for this year's Canada's Safest Employers Awards.

Mr. Fitzgerald is one of many hard-working, dedicated and talented public service employees who come to work every day in efforts to make this province a better place for us all. I thank Mr. Fitzgerald for his commitment to safety in our workplace and thank all the public service employees for the commitment they actually give.

The role in which Mr. Fitzgerald plays within the Department of Transportation and Works is an important one, and as this is North American Occupational Safety and Health Week, I encourage all employees to follow the lead of Mr. Fitzgerald and ensure that safety is always top of mind when you carry out the responsibilities.

Once again, I congratulate Mr. Fitzgerald on this accomplishment.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I, too, thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement, and I'm very pleased to join with him in congratulating Mr. Fitzgerald. It is encouraging that safety is a priority for this government. But, speaking of those who work in challenging environments, there's still an issue with the safety of police, firefighters and paramedics working as first responders on the side of the highway. There are many concerns that the Move Over legislation is not working and drivers are ignoring the rules.

I urge government, for the sake of all of these workers and Transportation and Works workers as well, to look into this and work on solutions.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to congratulate the Towns of Old Perlican and Flatrock, which have received \$500 FireSmart Community Preparedness Day grants. These grants are provided through our province's membership in Partners in Protection, a national organization dedicated to making communities safe from wildland fires.

Newfoundland and Labrador has been a part of the FireSmart Canada Community Recognition Program since 2013. This year, up to 20 project funding awards were available nationally to implement neighbourhood projects.

Municipalities use these grants to continue raising awareness, protect homes and become FireSmart. With this grant, the Town of Flatrock hosted a wildland fire awareness and FireSmart preparedness public meeting yesterday. The Town of Old Perlican will use its grant to host a wildfire awareness and FireSmart open house at a later date.

Mr. Speaker, our fire suppression staff encounter fires, particularly in the spring, that place neighbourhoods, communities, the public and firefighters at risk. As part of the National Wildfire Community Preparedness Day, which was on May 6, we asked Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to become aware of techniques to minimize the risk of wildland fire damage.

Until the end of forest fire season on September 30, we ask all communities across our province and the country to participate in local mitigation projects to help reduce the risk of wildland fires in our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. Mr. Speaker, I would also like to

congratulate the Towns of Old Perlican and Flatrock on receiving these grants. I know the Town of Flatrock hosted their event yesterday with representatives from various community organizations and the Torbay Volunteer Fire Department in attendance.

Mr. Speaker, last week we spoke about brush fires and how destructive they can be. It is also important to raise awareness on fire safety and events such as those sponsored through the FireSmart grants do exactly that. We should make every effort to protect our properties and communities and become FireSmart. I encourage everyone to take extra precautions during the forest fire season.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I, too, thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. I'm pleased that these two communities received grants from the Partners in Protection in their work to make their communities safe. Seasonal wildfires are a potential problem, especially as climate change effects make our communities more vulnerable.

I hope the government will find ways for other communities to do the important public education as well in order to minimize the risk of fire.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

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

Mr. Speaker, yesterday here in the House of Assembly the Minister of Natural Resources said the Oversight Committee is now working with EY to finalize the interim report.

I ask the minister: Why would the Oversight Committee be working to finalize what's supposed to be an independent report?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Oversight Committee was the body that initiated and was responsible for the initial report. They are working with EY to put the framework around the parameters around the finalization of that report – not details of that report, but the parameters and the framework around the finalization of that report.

They were also discussing, Mr. Speaker, how the Oversight Committee moves forward with independent assessment.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I say to the minister that having the Oversight Committee helping to finalize a report removes the credibility from what was supposed to be an independent report – a report independent from government.

So I ask the minister will she release the report as it is before her and her government get a chance to liberalize that report.

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

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, talk about revising what I said. What I said was that the Oversight Committee – which, in fact, we've put more independence on them. The former

administration, the PC government, had no independence on that Oversight Committee at all, Mr. Speaker, which was a problem identified by EY.

I can tell you that the Oversight Committee is the group is engaged with EY. EY is independent, as we all know, and will produce and finalize the report from last year. The Oversight Committee is not working in conjunction with EY; the Oversight Committee is responsible to engage EY and provide the framework.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I want to remind the Member opposite – with all respect – that the clerk of the Executive Council who was clerk while we were in power was completely independent from any political partisanship and from what government was doing. An independent clerk is what we had appointed there and was also a member of that Oversight Committee. That was independence on that Oversight Committee, Mr. Speaker.

Months have passed, Mr. Speaker, months –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. P. DAVIS: Fourteen months have passed since the due date announced by government in December 2015. One of the first commitments that this government made to the people of the province is they'd have an independent report finalized by March 2016. Now, the minister said the oversight committee is working with EY using their tools.

If this is the case, I'll ask the minister again: When will they release their liberalized report?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind all hon. Members, the only individual I wish to hear from is the individual recognized to speak.

The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources.

MS. COADY: With respect, Mr. Speaker, it is doing an injustice to the people of the province to twist words and manipulate ideas.

Mr. Speaker, what I said was the oversight committee was responsible for EY and responsible for oversight. Mr. Speaker, they are also looking at how do we engage and ensure independent assessment as we move forward in this process.

The report of EY in April of 2016 outlined a number of recommendations that we have implemented, Mr. Speaker. One of the identified issues was the Astaldi contract which the former administration didn't have exactly right. So Nalcor was working to ensure that the Astaldi contract was renegotiated and redeveloped to ensure the powerhouse could be completed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Well, in actual fact, it was the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and the minister himself who proudly said they were going to conduct an independent report. It was announced on December 21, 2015. They said they were going to undertake a comprehensive independent review; the process will be completed by March 2016. We're far from that.

Mr. Speaker, what we have over there is we have a Minister of Education who last week is completely hands off an independent review and now we have a Minister of Natural Resources who can't keep her hands off an independent review.

Minister, how are you doing business in your department?

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

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, I will not be schooled by the Opposition Leader when it comes to improving Muskrat Falls.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, one of the issues identified in the report by EY was Astaldi.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. COADY: The former administration and the current Leader of the Opposition knew there was a problem with the Astaldi contract way back in June of 2015 and did not act. That was what the EY report indicated in April. We spent right up until – we, as in Nalcor – December discussing, renegotiating and improving the terms of that contract. That was successfully concluded in December.

In January, the oversight committee, and I actually engaged as well in that discussion with EY to say: How do we finalize the '16 report and how do we ensure independent assessment going forward – something that they never did.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Finance Minister referred to the Oil Revenue Risk Adjustment as a buffer against moving oil prices.

Minister, you had one last year, none for this year's projection, but have one in again for the next five years. Why not for this year?

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

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

I thank the Member opposite. One of the things we did this year when we were building the

budget, that hadn't been done in former years under the former administration, is that in addition to the lengthy list of oil forecasters that we use, we also held a round-table discussion that I participated in with officials, with economists from our banking syndicate.

Their advice was that based on the information that we had that oil price risk is higher in our out years. As a result, the decision was made based on the learnings over the last year that we would modify how we use the Oil Revenue Risk Adjustment to make sure that our budgeting was reasonable.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: If she included a buffer in your 2017 budget forecast, would the budget meet your deficit reduction target of \$800 million?

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, the budget that we presented to the House of Assembly that is being debated is based on the best information we have on revenue. As the Member opposite surely would understand based on his experience, their inability to accurately forecast oil created a situation where when oil was at \$120, \$140, they had some of the highest spending we've had in our province.

Our department and our officials, working very closely with advisors, are making sure that the oil forecast that we put in the budget is reasonable. Like every other Newfoundlander and Labradorian, I'm watching that oil price very closely, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it's my understanding that the 11 international forecasters that the minister used are the same ones that the prior administration used.

I'll ask the minister: This year's budget is based on oil of approximately \$75 Canadian a barrel, yet year to date the average is approximately \$70, so you're already behind. Without your buffer, how do you expect to make up this shortfall?

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, as we clearly communicated as part of the budget this year – and the Members opposite have this information – the oil price for this year is forecasted at \$56 US, with a US exchange rate of 75 cents US.

As we've seen in the last five to six weeks, that oil price has been performing less than we had anticipated but, certainly, as last year is an indication, oil price continues to be volatile. It's one of the reasons, quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, that we need to continue to focus on our spending and get our spending in line for the amount of money that the people of the province have for the services that we provide.

This is a volatile revenue and should not be used as one that sustains the spending of the province, Mr. Speaker. We are quite concerned about that and we'll continue to make decisions that are responsible, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In Estimates meetings last week, the minister was very evasive when asked about the proposed biofuel plant for Botwood. We were told that there is no active application and they would have to submit a business plan before a decision could be made. However, through an access to information response, we now know that much

talk has happened with the company and a business plan has indeed been submitted.

Why were you not forthcoming with that information, Minister?

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Any potential business plan or development that anybody wants to talk to the Department of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation can certainly do so. We have a business analysis division. We have a major projects investment unit that would receive those proposals, that would do due diligence on it, would run an analysis, would work with other departments that would be impacted by this, such as the Department of Fisheries and Land Resources, as well as Finance, to look at a return to Treasury and all the impacts that would happen.

Whenever we look at a big project on any scale, we have to do our due diligence, Mr. Speaker, and not make haste decisions on the back of paper napkins as they did opposite.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, the minister did not answer my question. It's great to get the education about what goes on in his department, but on this file we got information last week that conflicts with what we found out through an access to information request.

We've got the local MHA and the minister responsible for forestry in the news saying, basically, that this project is a done deal, while the minister responsible for business says something very different.

Last week, the department told us there wasn't even a business plan submitted, when we find out there in fact is. Who should we believe?

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

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

Mr. Speaker, what I have been quoted as saying, and the Member for Exploits and the Member for Grand Falls as well, is that we've worked with this company. We've identified a fibre supply. We will continue to work with this company as they work their business proposal forward.

Any time a company comes forward to our department, and the Department of Business, I'm quite sure we'll certainly work with them to identify their needs.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KENT: I thank the Minister of Land Resources for actually attempting to answer the question, at least.

I ask the minister – I ask that minister: Have other sawmill operators in the province been consulted regarding this proposal and are they supportive?

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

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

One thing that we have done since becoming government, I know the former minister who was responsible for forestry and myself have consulted very regularly with our forestry industry, no different than some of the challenges that are being faced today with softwood lumber.

Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that when we look at a project or different projects around the province, we always take into consideration our existing operators, and we'll continue to do that as we look at these proposals.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KENT: I thank the minister for answering my question.

A follow-up question, Mr. Speaker: How will the proposed biofuel plant impact existing sawmill operations in the province?

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

MR. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Member opposite should remember back to when they expropriated the mill in Grand Falls-Windsor because what happened when that mill closed, there became about 285,000 cubic metres available in the province that was used in Central Newfoundland.

I believe it was the previous administration who said that they would use that fibre to attract business to Central Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker. As a government, we're going to continue to use that fibre, that resource that belongs to the people of our province, for the best interests of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, in response to the questions earlier this week on the Liberal tax on icebergs, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment committed to take action by Friday, and even called one of the seven companies that have been impacted, and I commend him for doing that.

But I ask today: What action will the minister take by tomorrow to correct this situation?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I find the questions getting much better since there's a leadership race there in the front benches.

I have to say, Mr. Speaker, what I told the producer, what I told the person I spoke to, it's by next Friday that we'll have a review – it's next Friday.

Mr. Speaker, what I always say, though, is when you're dealing with companies, you always have to work together. You can't say yes – you can never say never.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KENT: I'm glad the minister thinks it's funny. I don't think the Liberal tax on icebergs is funny at all.

So I'll the minister then: What action will he take by next Friday?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, I've dealt with the person. I said to the media by next Friday we're hoping to have a resolution and I will call back the people involved.

Mr. Speaker, there's one little thing here I have to mention: the licensing fee – and usually you work with the groups, you work with them to try to find a solution – one little part is that every five years – that administration doubled it in 2015. That was never ever brought to attention.

They doubled the licensing fee. The reason why the fee wasn't even actually in place is because it's done every five years. If they hadn't known and looked at it – they had the fee already doubled in 2015, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, the recent increase, the new Liberal tax on icebergs, represents a 2,500 per cent increase.

I ask the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation: Why didn't you consider the impacts on our province's small businesses when you made the decision last year to increase the iceberg tax by 2,500 per cent?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I say to the Member, two days ago when he asked me to consult with them, which I did do, but that's not good enough. He asked me to find a resolution which we are working with the industry to help find a resolution.

Mr. Speaker, we had to find some way to put some value on water. As we said before and I said in the media, some of the bigger water producers is what this legislation is for and the people who are processing icebergs are caught up into that.

We are working with them. I made the call, I spoke to him personally. He was very pleased with the call that I made. He was very pleased that I said by next Friday I'll give him a call; we'll work back at it.

Mr. Speaker, I will work with the industry on this. I made a commitment that I will get to him by next Friday and I will fulfill that commitment.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The executive director of the AIDS Committee in Newfoundland and Labrador is on record this week acknowledging gaps in government's opioid action plan.

Will government take immediate action, as we requested last week, and provide free naloxone kits to pharmacies, to shelters, to youth homes and to our province's schools?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Parliamentary Assistant to the Department of Health and Community Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. B. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for the question. We saw this opioid crisis coming. We had put an opioid action plan in place. We put 1,200 naloxone kits on the streets – not all of them have been taken advantage of at this point – at 74 public sites across our province.

We have a planning committee in place, a working group, trying to increase the reach of those naloxone kits to ensure they get in the hands of the individuals that require them the most.

These are important things, decisions being made by people that understand what they have to do, much more than anybody in this House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KENT: Wow! It's nice to see the minister's arrogance has rubbed off already on the parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Speaker, the 1,200 kits are not on the street. That's exactly the issue. We have pharmacists who are qualified all over the province that could be part of the solution. Local pharmacists have said that pharmacies should be distributing naloxone kits as they are more than qualified to dispense, to consult and to do injection training.

Will the minister move quickly to ensure pharmacists are working at their full scope of practice, better positioned to save more lives? Let's put the kits in pharmacies, in schools and in other places where they can actually save lives. Will the department finally commit to doing the right thing and follow the advice of its own advisory group?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Parliamentary Assistant to the Department of Health and Community Services.

MR. B. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member isn't suggesting that we just go out and do this without having the industry professionals make those decisions. So we've established a naloxone distribution network. Those are trained professionals, pharmacists are there, represented, industry professionals, community partners that we're working with. We want to get these into the hands of the people that need them the most. We're going to continue to do that.

We're not going to follow suit on the plans that you've made. We're focused on the plans that are in this initiative. We're working with those independent experts, arm's-length from us, and we're going to listen to those people.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, when you announced in late February you were moving Crown Lands to Corner Brook, you said to position it near the majority of agriculture and forestry activity within our province.

Can you tell us where the majority of agriculture requests have come from in recent years?

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

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

Mr. Speaker, if you look at the changes that we've made as a government with regard to agriculture and making the land more accessible to our farmers and our processors, it's very important for us. If you look at the 64 new parcels of land that we've gone out and cut down the silos on so they're available for farmers in an expedited way, I think it's about 95 per cent of those lands are located off the

Avalon, and the vast majority of them west of Grand Falls.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, the majority of applications for Crown lands are on the East Coast, and many of the related services and agencies, like Registry of Deeds, are also located in St. John's.

Can you tell us how this will make Crown Lands' process and service delivery more efficient?

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

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

I thank the hon. Member for the opportunity to correct what he's saying here today. Mr. Speaker, last year in Eastern Newfoundland there were 1,054 Crown lands applications and Eastern Newfoundland would include the Clarenville office.

Mr. Speaker, those 1,054 people will see no difference this year than they seen last year. Because if the hon. Member wants to make a Crown lands application in September or October or November of next year, he'll still do it at the Howley Building the same as 1,000 people did last year, Mr. Speaker. The 1,054 applications last year represented about 37 per cent of the applications in the province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I guess my question to you minister is, why is it being moved? Why is it leaving where it is if there's no benefit?

Minister, the *Lands Act* requires the Lands Branch to maintain a registry of documents. The current public registry is located in a fireproof vault at the Howley Building in St. John's.

Are hardcopies of all Crown land records moving to Corner Brook or will you have to renovate the leased space to accommodate the Crown Lands material and equipment?

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

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

I thank the hon. Member for the question. Mr. Speaker, the reality is there are records in that vault that date back to the 1800s. Last year under the previous minister, they started to put a plan in place to have those records digitalized. This past Monday, we started on a project that's going to last until about the end of this summer to digitalize those records. You have to remember, Mr. Speaker, those records date back to the 1800s. They need to be digitalized.

One of the things that the new digital records are going to make accessible, Mr. Speaker, is that people throughout this province are going to be able to go online and find their record. Not only that, we're also committed to an atlas so that in the future people will only have to go online to do Crown lands applications, and all records now will be protected for generations to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Mr. Speaker, we're being told it's going to take a lot longer than three to four months to digitize these records.

Can you tell us how you plan on getting those records digitized by the end of August?

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

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, we're going to use the technology, I'll tell the hon. Member, called a scanner. We brought in the equipment to make this doable. We've hired the people to make this doable, Mr. Speaker, and I can assure the hon. Member that we will take the time that's required to get these records digitized. These records are very important to our province, Mr. Speaker. You have to realize there's a historical value. These records date back to the 1800s.

I can assure the hon. Member opposite, stop fear mongering, we will get this done and we'll get it done right.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I've often reminded Members of the Legislature to respect the individual stood to speak. I will make one final plea today. I expect that the only individual recognized to speak is the individual that is recognized to speak.

The hon. Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, you just referenced these very fragile documents. They've been in storage since the 1830s. You told us in Estimates you were planning to do this work in-house.

Who is doing the work to handle these fragile, historic documents and do they have any specialized training?

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

MR. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. Member is questioning the capabilities of staff at Crown Lands. They deal with these documents on a daily basis.

He talks about the value of these documents dating back to the 1800s. Absolutely, Mr. Speaker, and we respect that.

We know that The Rooms has an interest in these documents that date back to the 1800s. They're very important to us, Mr. Speaker, and we'll ensure it's done in a timely fashion and a fashion that's respectful to the value of these important records.

To keep coming back and throwing out numbers, Mr. Speaker, you have to realize that 65 per cent of the Crown lands applications in this province come from outside the Avalon. We're going to respond to the needs of the people around the province who want to use Crown lands. Again, I'll reiterate, the service for the people that use Crown lands today in St. John's and Clarenville on the Eastern part of the province will not change.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Conception Bay South, a very quick question without preamble.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Minister, have you hired any additional staff to do this specialized work?

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

MR. CROCKER: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker, we've hired additional staff. At the moment I think there are eight additional staff working with the people that are already there that has the expertise.

A lot of this work is IM work and we'll make sure that it's done in a proper, professional manner. Anybody going in to do this work, Mr. Speaker, will be properly trained.

As well, I have to remind the hon. Member, he stands up day after day fear mongering, Mr. Speaker. We will do what's best for the people at Crown Lands.

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.

In *Budget 2017*, government doubled the expected cut to Memorial University, ignoring the multi-year MUN attrition plan that government had agreed to. This cut could result today in increases to tuition and other student fees.

I ask the Premier: Will he take responsibility for any tuition and other fee increases at Memorial?

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

MR. BYRNE: Mr. Speaker, this government will indeed take responsibility for providing Memorial University of Newfoundland with \$56.4 million this year to encourage and incentivize a tuition freeze for Newfoundland and Labrador students.

Mr. Speaker, we have encouraged as well the university to consider – before raising any revenue from students or expecting more money from taxpayers, we ask them to consider reducing their expenses. We also ask the university to supply greater disclosure and transparency for the funds that they do receive from the public purse and from students as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. MICHAEL: Mr. Speaker, last year, government reduced the grant portion in the student loan program and increased the loan portion. This year, students will be forced to max out the federal portion of their loan before they can qualify for a provincial grant.

I ask the Premier: Will he take responsibility for imposing this new financial burden on students or will he continue to hide behind his AESL Minister?

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

MR. BYRNE: Oh my, Mr. Speaker, there's no one hiding from anyone.

There was a decision that was taken by the federal government approximately a year-and-a-half ago, I understand. Some good decisions where they would increase the amount of student grants that would be available through the federal Student Financial Assistance Program. They also did some modifications to the eligibility criteria which were quite helpful to students.

Mr. Speaker, as I explained in the Estimates Committee, the federal government also did impose or require that students would have a fixed-rate contribution. In other words, what that means, no matter what the means, whatever the ability for the student to be able to provide for their own education, they would require a minimum of \$3,000. That was a change of policy. Modifications by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador were meant to offset that, and it did indeed achieve that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, *Budget 2016* included a poorly thought out and regressive book tax that includes taxing books sold at post-secondary institutions, resulting in yet another financial burden on students' shoulders.

I ask the Premier: Will he do the right thing and immediately remove the tax from post-secondary books?

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

MR. BYRNE: Mr. Speaker, I'm very, very pleased to inform this House that within the Student Financial Assistance Program offered by

the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, we have taken into consideration the means and expenditures of the student, their cost of attending post-secondary education. Built within the cost structure of a student is indeed of course the cost of textbooks.

The full in cost of all textbooks, including any additional taxes, are indeed included for the consideration for the student's access to grants for their education. So we have accommodated that by providing additional grant opportunities for Newfoundland and Labrador students.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, there are no additional monies in those grants to pay for the hike in textbooks because of the tax.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Finance: How much did government make on the book tax from January to March 2017, and how much of that amount was from post-secondary textbooks?

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, for the Member opposite, as the Minister of ASL has already communicated, students who meet the means testing that is available and who qualify for grants can have the entire costs of their academic books that they need at university covered; but, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to what the Members opposite refer to as the book tax, which really was a rebate on behalf of the taxpayers of the province for books in Newfoundland and Labrador, we made the very difficult decision that that was an action we had to take last year.

As I've said to the Member opposite, we will continue to look at that as part of the tax review that's coming up this year. When we have the ability to rebate for books that are purchased versus paying for hospital beds, we'll certainly take a look at that, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table a document here related to position eliminations and position creations associated with the change to the management structure, and this document I'm tabling today on May 11, 2017.

Mr. Speaker, as per my commitment to this House, today I'm tabling a list of positions eliminated as well as a list of positions created as a result of the changes to the management structure announced in February. This information reflects actions taken as of May 8, 2017, and there are a number of items that I wish to highlight and these are noted as footnotes in the materials that I will be tabling.

The term actioned, for the purpose of this report, means that the department has notified any impacted employees. In all but 16 cases, the position has been vacated and is ready to be eliminated. The 16 positions that have employees attached to them, these employees have been notified that the position will be abolished at a later date; therefore, the net reduction is 292 positions reflecting actions taken as of May 8.

With respect to the position creations, there are some positions yet to be created, but because the action has not occurred yet, these have not been included in this list, Mr. Speaker, and I'll table that.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to take the opportunity to table a response to a question I was asked yesterday in the House. The Member for Ferryland asked me a question about the information I tabled last week specifically related to position reductions in *Budget 2016*.

In *Budget 2016*, I announced there would be a reduction of 450 FTEs in the agencies, boards and commissions, and 200 positions in core government. I also indicated at that time that upcoming retirements presented an opportunity and that our government will continue our commitment to using attrition as a preferred means to reduce the workforce.

The information tabled last week reflects decisions made as part of *Budget 2016*. It provides the list of full-time equivalent eliminations to date for the agencies, boards and commissions as of November 2016, and position eliminations for core government as of March 31, 2017.

For positions identified in core government to be abolished but have not yet been, these would reflect the budget decisions for 2016, former attrition targets by the former administration, government renewal initiative decision, as well as changes to the management structure that have yet to be acted on and positions that have yet to be abolished.

Mr. Speaker, the Member opposite also asked yesterday about questions related to a particular department –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. C. BENNETT: – and I'll certainly provide him with that information at his leisure.

MR. SPEAKER: I think the first was a document to be tabled. I think the second was an Answer to a Question for which Notice has been Given. We'll consider it tabled under that.

Further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

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

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, I give notice I will ask leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Natural Products Marketing Act. (Bill 10)

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

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

First, I give notice that I will ask leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Proceedings Against The Crown Act. (Bill 11)

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, in accordance with the provisional Standing Order 11, I give notice under provisional Standing Order 11, I shall move that the House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Monday, May 15, 2017.

Mr. Speaker, I further give notice that under provincial Standing Order 11, I shall move that the House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, May 16, 2017.

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 of Newfoundland and Labrador humbly sheweth:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Speaker, it was very interesting to hear the non-answers or the answers to the questions I raised to the Minister of AESL and the Premier and the Finance Minister about their tax on textbooks; textbooks, Mr. Speaker, an absolute necessity. Not a frill. Not a luxury, but textbooks. It makes no sense at all.

Not only should the tax be immediately removed – it is a rebate, we know that, but for the ease in speaking about this issue. This tax rebate should be reinstated or the tax should be removed. Not only should that happen, but we also believe that students who have paid taxes on their school books, on their textbooks, that those taxes should immediately be reimbursed as well. So not only to cut the tax on books, but to also reimburse students who've had to pay taxes on books.

It's very interesting the way government has pitted students and administration against each other at MUN now because of government squeezing the university and the administration, but then to do an extra burden on students by placing a tax on textbooks. It just flies in the face of reason, Mr. Speaker. There's nothing to be gained in this. No one wins.

As the minister says, well, then people who are going to get government grants, they get some money for textbooks and that will cover their textbooks. However, Mr. Speaker, that's still an unnecessary burden on students – students who

are getting grants and also students who aren't eligible for grants.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

WHEREAS we insist that the well-being and safety of our families take priority over any economic consideration; and

WHEREAS we reject, in advance, any Nalcor-led plan to send its experts to Labrador to inform; and

WHEREAS we are calling for a process where independent experts are provided with everything they need to ascertain the safety of the North Spur: i.e., the proper mandate, documents, financing and time; and

WHEREAS we demand this process have a public component where we, the people, can have access and can ask questions; and

WHEREAS the Premier promised to open the books on Muskrat Falls and, so far, that has not happened;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to consider the establishment of an independent expert review of the North Spur.

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

Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to stand and present this petition on behalf of people who believe that this government should be paying much more attention to the concerns of people in Labrador with regard to the North Spur which is related to the Muskrat Falls Project.

I do know that besides my having the petition that this petition was presented to government through the Minister of Environment. They have great hope that government is going to pay close attention but, so far, there are no signs they are going to.

It is very important, Mr. Speaker, that an independent review panel be put in place. We really haven't had a fully independent review body. We know that there are people around the world, geotechnical experts, who have real concerns about this North Spur and who are interested and willing to look at this issue and to present their views and their evidence with regard to the concerns about North Spur.

An expert review panel, an independent review panel, could call upon such international experts that are out there with their concerns. We have experts here in our own province. There is so much confusion around this issue and many different positions. For the government and for Nalcor and for those responsible for Muskrat Falls to move ahead pooh-poohing those concerns which are based on evidence as well and which come from experts as well is irresponsible.

We also have the traditional knowledge of the people from Labrador who have lived and hunted and fished in that whole area and have long-standing traditional knowledge of generations, Mr. Speaker. That knowledge was presented during the environmental assessment panel, but government refused to listen to the recommendations of that panel.

Thank you, 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 infertility is not an inconvenience, it is a disease of the reproductive system that

impairs the body's ability to perform the basic function of reproduction; and

WHEREAS infertility affects women and men equally; and

WHEREAS treating infertility is excessively expensive and cost prohibitive; and

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

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

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition has been signed by residents across Newfoundland and Labrador. This is an issue that affects families throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. I've heard from a number of my constituents and a number of people outside of my district as well who have asked that we raise this issue in the House of Assembly. It is one that, as I said, touches many.

I received a note from one constituent who indicates that she feels like fertility is something that's taken for granted by most people and taboo for those who actually go through it, and because of this, it's not talked about enough. She notes that people go to a fertility clinic, get their tests and procedures and try to forget about it.

She urges people to start looking at the clinic as a relief and an exciting experience knowing that there may finally be a solution. She says the last thing that should influence a person's emotions and decision making at the clinic is finances. No one should have to remortgage, take out a loan or sell the things we have worked so hard to get. Most people are worried about saving money for maternity leave when people with fertility issues have to owe so much money from the beginning.

Basically what she's saying is: Why should we wait until every other province covers fertility treatment? Why don't we join a couple of the

larger provinces that have taken the lead in that regard? I think it's an issue that's worth looking at. I believe there is more that can be done. And given the number of families that are affected in our province, I would urge government to take a closer look at the issue and see what can be done.

Thank you.

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise in the House today to present a petition. It's certainly an issue that I've brought to the floor of the House many times before.

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 2015* announced a new school for the Witless Bay-Mobile school system; and

WHEREAS the planning and design of this school was completed; and

WHEREAS the project was cancelled in *Budget 2016*;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to reverse its decision and construct the proposed school for the Witless Bay-mobile school system.

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

Again, we have gone through a process with the residents of the area in regard to asking government to reconsider this. We've certainly made representation to the Minister of Education and the parent community has come as well and has made representation to him. They have asked to have a meeting with the Premier. I think on April 4 they asked. I asked him

yesterday in the House if he would consider discussing this issue and hearing the thoughts and understanding of those in that region from Bay Bulls to Bauline. We haven't got a response on that, which is unfortunate.

The other evening on a Facebook Live CBC interview the Premier was asked about it by one of the parents from the area that emailed in a question. At that time, amazingly, he said the decision was made by the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, which was totally incorrect; it was inaccurate.

Everything to date has demonstrated that this decision was made to cancel this school by the current government. It was approved in 2015 based on a BAE-Newplan report that indicated that a middle school was the best alternative here. The Newfoundland and Labrador English School District approved that, recommended it to government. Again, last fall when they put their infrastructure list to this current Liberal government, they included this new middle school on the list. It was this government that denied it, I guess, the Premier and through Cabinet.

But yesterday, or the other night the Premier stood and basically said that wasn't the case and the English School District had cancelled the school, which is totally incorrect. Even to date, with the nine classrooms that are being proposed the Newfoundland English School District has never approved that, has never recommended it. And even today, what we're hearing with the consultants on site in Mobile and the footprint, it's something that they're having trouble even making do with the footprint of Mobile High. The cost is escalating. Even the rationale behind this is getting more ludicrous by the day as they move forward in their region to do this.

We urge government, the people of the community as well, for the Premier to answer their call to sit, meet and discuss this; to get back and look at the numbers and for rationale to why this was originally approved, to why that hasn't changed while the numbers still exist; still support it, and let's move on and get this done.

Even the parent community has said to government: If we need to push this out for a year or two to reach the financing, we're willing

to work with you to do it. A government that's hailed consultation and let's sit down and resolve issues, yet today they won't do that. This is a blatant case.

We don't know why this is cancelled, but we wish at some point someone would tell us and we move forward in the best interests of those people in that region.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. 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 the provincial government has mandated the Eastern Regional Service Board to implement modern waste management practices in the Eastern region; and

WHEREAS the Eastern Regional Service Board has opened a waste recovery facility on Old Brigus Road in Whitbourne to receive bulk items such as appliances, furniture, electronics, car and truck tires, construction and demolition debris, shingles, et cetera;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to insist mitigation measures be established to contain waste held at the facility and improve esthetics surrounding the containment area.

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

Mr. Speaker, I have numerous petitions on this same issue.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. PETTEN: It has to do with a drop-off facility that's located on Old Brigus Road in

Whitbourne. As I've just said, it's not your household garbage but it's the larger items.

There's a tender that's been called. Right now there's going to be a fence erected across the front with, I believe, six trees. Residents don't feel this is going to be adequate to close it off. It's an eyesore right now to residents, the travelling public and tourists alike that come up and pass by there. There will be an increase in that, obviously, as summer season approaches.

There's garbage that's blowing all around the community in areas around close to that area. As I said recently, there was even a box spring that blew out on the Trans-Canada in the median. Residents have concerns. They've brought this to the town and they've approached me to bring it to the House of Assembly and petition government to urge the Eastern Regional Service Board to insist on better mitigation issues.

One thing that's being proposed is fencing going right around this facility. Another issue is to provide covered containment. Right now it's just holes in the ground, I think, with concrete walls around. They're not adequate on windy days and as we know, it's not uncommon to have a lot of those days. It's not doing the proper work. They'd like to have those areas contained and covered.

Another thing that's been asked and people are requesting is maybe when they put the fence up, provide a berm to cover off from visibility, people can't see it and it also would serve as somewhat of a buffer to preventing stuff from blowing around.

One other point that residents have also expressed concern about is, unfortunately, you can't control behaviour but there are people dropping off other garbage in the gateway outside this area. So they've suggested to the Eastern Regional Service Board to maybe install video surveillance. Unfortunately, those things are inevitable to happen but they don't want to turn this into a dump on the side of the road and not meet what is required to do, as being just like a transshipment facility. Right now it's becoming an eyesore. It's a great concern to residents in the area.

While this tender is being called, residents are calling upon the Eastern Regional Services Board, which I am lobbying government, to insist on extra measures being taken so that when they do it the first time they do it right, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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 smaller class sizes, adequate learning environments and effective curriculum are paramount to success of our youth; and

WHEREAS recent budget decisions have negatively impacted student supports, educational resources and teacher allocations; and

WHEREAS the provincial education system should ensure that each child has the ability to reach his or her full potential;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to enhance the education system in Newfoundland and Labrador; introduce initiatives which ensure smaller class sizes which will provide more sufficient personal space per child and allow more individual learning opportunities; develop effective curriculum which will enable youth to develop both life skills and optimal academic achievement; provide resources to ensure a fully beneficial inclusion model is in place and to ensure all children in our province have equal standards of education in their learning environment.

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

Mr. Speaker, I've been presenting a number of petitions around education for the last number of months because I continue to hear and receive emails and calls from concerned parents, from students themselves, which is alarming when students identify that there is inadequacies within their school system and there are challenges that are not being met.

We're hearing it from school councils. We're hearing it from the prospective agencies that work within the school services: the Association of Psychologists. We're hearing it from the NLTA. We're even hearing it from NAPE and CUPE, agencies that work within the school system and other avenues.

It's becoming a real challenge here and a real issue about how do we address some of the issues within our education system. When you have parent organizations, and particularly all over this province – and I note, just looking at some of the names here, some of the communities. They're from Random Island, Shoal Harbour, Bunyan's Cove – well then that tells you that this is not isolated to one particular school or isolated to one particular area of our province, or one particular age category or level of school.

It's not just around high schools or middle schools or the elementary schools. This is about parents, students, administrators, teachers, counsellors, the public having a concern about our education system and the holes and the gaps we have in being able to provide an adequate, safe environment.

As we noted a few months ago, CBC had a three-part documentary on Monday evenings where teachers from various backgrounds, various geographic backgrounds, periods of time they've served in it, the role they play in the education system, outline their concerns. Concerns were about class sizes. It was about having the resources to do things properly. It was about having more engagement to address the needs, particularly around inclusive learning, but you can't do some of these things if you don't have the proper resources.

They talked about violence in schools. When you've got 28-30 students in a classroom and you get some students who may be volatile with

each other, there may be conflicts, you may have some behavioural issues, it's a lot harder for that instructor, that teacher to be able to deal with those situations.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'll have an opportunity to speak to this and many other issues that are in the education system over the near few weeks.

Thank you.

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

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

Orders of the Day.

MR. SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

MR. A. PARSONS: I would call from the Order Paper, Motion 1, the Budget Speech, main motion.

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

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

I'm very pleased to be able to stand again today and speak to the budget. For those who are watching, we are now in the final phase of the debate on the budget. We are now debating the main motion. We've had the vote of non-confidence, which was defeated by government, and we had the sub-amendment, which was defeated by government. So now we are back to the main motion, and I'm very pleased to speak to this.

When the time comes to vote, I'm sure I'll be voting against the main motion and government will be voting for it, but I will continue to speak to this budget and to speak to how this budget is not a good one. How it builds on an extremely bad one, the one from 2016, how this maintains the budget of 2016 and continues down the path of a route that is not going to be good and is not good for the people of the province. We will continue to speak against it and, of course, we'll

vote against it, just as we had to vote against 2016.

I know what the government is facing. All of us in the province are well aware of what the government is facing. The provincial deficit is a very serious issue – I'm not going to doubt that and it must be addressed, but the way in which this government is dealing with it, Mr. Speaker, is the issue.

This government's approach to reducing the deficit is that their attack on the deficit is taking priority over the needs of the people of the province. What's starting to happen is that we are going backwards, not forward. Things that had been put in place for the good of the people, things that had been put in place in education, things that had been put in place in health care, things that had been put in place in assistance for people who need help, things have been taken away that had been put in – these weren't frills, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, it's quite possible that down the road or in the past there are things that were put in budgets that were not for the good of the people and benefited the government and made them look good. When we start cutting the programs for people that we were starting to put in place in this province, when we start cutting those because we're giving priority to the deficit, then we have a problem.

Senior government leaders show a great passion to address the issue of the deficit. The Minister of Finance shows real passion to reduce the deficit. The Premier shows real passion to reduce the deficit. Government shows real passion to reduce the deficit. People see that. What I'm saying to the government, what I'm saying to the Premier, to the Minister of Finance, to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, what I'm saying to everybody who's sitting in that government is that we want to see the same passion for providing the best services to the people of the province. That's where the passion should be.

Then the goal should be how we address the deficit while still meeting the needs of the people of the province. The deficit needs addressing for sure, but the needs of the people of the province, all the people, need to be the

necessary consideration, not a secondary consideration.

The need of the people of the province is to see that passion. They need to know that government is concerned about them, that they are government's focus, they are government's passion, not satisfying and appeasing the bond raters and money lenders but focused on the needs of the people. This government has to have what is needed to say back to the bond raters and the money lenders, we know our responsibility, here's our plan for that responsibility but that plan has to include the needs of people.

Mr. Speaker, I have spoken in this House before and mentioned structural adjustment that went on decades ago, thanks to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. What happened there was a fight back eventually had to be taken by governments to say this is not working. Cutting services, cutting social programs, cutting things that are helping the people of our countries, the poorest countries in the world, that's not the way to go and they fought back. Even the World Bank and IMF changed their tactics.

This is what this government has to do, Mr. Speaker. It has to look at what are the needs of the people. The debt, a product of decades of mismanagement, must be addressed but the people of the province need to know government is on their side, as I said, not on the side of the bond rating agencies and the business community. The people of the province do not have that confidence – far from it, as a matter of fact.

Government seems to need to be reminded. Let's look at what happened in 2016 and what's still going on, Mr. Speaker. One of the things, for example, was the transportation benefit for parents under the Child Care Services Subsidy Program. That was eliminated last year. It is still eliminated. This was a benefit that was provided to low-income families to pay for their children to use buses operated by daycare centres. The subsidy ceased in the fall of 2016. Some daycare centres depended on the benefit to help operate their buses, which can cost tens of thousands of dollars. But besides the daycare centres

themselves, the parents who got the subsidies can't afford to pay for those buses.

I don't know how the people on the government side of the House think that people on low-income, people earning minimum wage for example, have the money to do that. This is why we need real plans put in place for a child care program in this province, a public, universally accessible child care program. We've got to start taking seriously the need for that program: one, for the good of children; two, for the good of parents; and three, for the good of the economy.

If this government were to take that seriously and put a plan in place and show the people they're trying to appease, the moneylenders and the bond raters, and show them how this plan could work both for the people as well as for the economy, I'm sure that those people would listen. I'm sure that the creditors would listen; they just need to see plans in place to do that.

The only plan this government has is cut, cut, cut in order to get at the deficit and in order to help with the payments with regard to the debt – cut, cut, cut. What they're cutting are the people of the province. They use terminology that takes the humanity out of it, and that's what's really disturbing, Mr. Speaker. It does take the humanity out of it.

Let's look at something else with regard to early childhood development. This government in 2016 eliminated the workplace training program for early childhood educators. What they had is a workplace training program that helped them to access certification by training on the job.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development was working on the program. There was a budget of \$500,000 in 2015 to train 50 employees a year, but it was not implemented. The money was in the budget and wasn't implemented.

It was designed to help child care staff upgrade to Level I which is a requirement under the early childhood development strategy. Under that strategy, the workers were required to upgrade to Level I. The idea of putting the training in place, the on-the-job training program, was to bring those workers up to Level I, a minimum requirement.

Employers would receive funding to hire substitutes while their employees were taking an accelerated ECE program. There was to be a prior learning assessment and recognition component where experienced staff could obtain credit for skills acquired in the field.

There are many staff out there who have all kinds of experience and really do know what they're doing, but they're not certified. It's absolutely important in this day and age for them to be certified. What they could do, because of the on-the-job training program, the way it would have been designed, would give them credit for skills already acquired and then further their certification.

The Association of Early Childhood Educators of Newfoundland and Labrador came out strongly about the need for this program to get people properly trained because there is a shortage of Level I ECE workers. So we have regulations in place but we don't put in place what's needed to help people be able to live up to those regulations. Again, something that this government did in the 2016 budget which is still continuing, they have not put in place, they have not made operational a plan that was a solid plan in the 2015-2016 budget. That is just unacceptable, Mr. Speaker.

Let's look at some other things under Education and Early Childhood Development. We had last year an increased class size. We had multi-grade classes brought in, and those two things, Mr. Speaker, eliminated 61.5 teaching units at a time when we have the highest unemployment and do not need more people unemployed. Not all of those units resulted in people being unemployed but a lot of them did.

An additional 15 units have been cut in this year so far, Mr. Speaker. That's what happened because of 2016 budget and the budget this year. I cannot believe in this day and age this is going on in our educational system, at the same time that we use the fancy language of having inclusion education when in actual fact we don't because we're not putting the resources in place to really have a full inclusion model.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, people in the system, parents, teachers, those who are involved with the educational system and who

are affected by it, they tell us that the so-called inclusion model because of inadequate resources is actually excluding rather than including. Everybody in the classroom is suffering from this, not just children who have exceptionalities and exceptional needs on whatever end that might be, especially those, Mr. Speaker, who have learning disabilities, who are on the autism spectrum. Besides those, there are also the children who are highly capable, have high IQs, all of them, Mr. Speaker, are suffering from the lack of resources in our classroom, lack of resources in the system to allow the inclusion model to work.

I can't understand why this government can't see it. It's crazy, because I know what they're trying to do but while they're trying to do it, they're causing a whole lot more damage in the name of taking care of the deficit. They're causing a whole lot more damage. How much more damage is going to be done to our children, to our system during these years that they are doing all these cuts and maintaining these cuts? It's just crazy, Mr. Speaker.

It's like saying to somebody who has a disease, in order to get better you really need this, this and this to get better, but we can't start it for two years. Well, Mr. Speaker, by the time the medicine starts or by the time the health care starts for that person, the person is going to be much worse when it comes to the disease that the person has. That's the same thing that's happening here. More and more damage is being done in our system because of what this government has done.

If they don't take seriously the report from the Task Force on Educational Outcomes, I am really going to be very disturbed because I cannot believe the task force is going to be saying anything much differently than what I'm saying myself, what others are saying out there, what those who went to them and witnessed and made representations have said.

I am convinced they're going to have strong messages for this government and strong recommendations, especially when it comes to the resources needed for inclusion. Inclusion is not a tack on; inclusion is now supposed to be the model. That's supposed to be the framework

of the model, but this government is not making it work.

Let's look at AESL, Mr. Speaker. Today we asked some questions around this because we have a reduced grant portion and an increased loan portion for our students. The minister can speak all the way he wants, he can twist things around all he wants, the bottom line is students are finding it harder. Their debt load is being increased. They are really feeling pressured when it comes to grants.

Not everybody qualifies for grants, Mr. Speaker, so let's talk about the tax on textbooks. If you're not somebody who qualifies for a grant, then everything that was said here in the House today in response to questions in Question Period means nothing. Yet, not being eligible for a grant doesn't mean you're wealthy. Yeah, there are people who are wealthy and there are students who have wealthy parents, but in this province they're in the minority.

The majority of students who are out there paying \$300 and \$400 and \$500 in tax – I've had the students come to me and tell me, paying that much in tax on their books and they're not getting any rebates. They're not. So how this government can continue to support the things they've done in their budgets, I don't know.

They eliminated the grants for students studying outside the province in programs available in Newfoundland and Labrador. Well, there may be really solid reasons why students are studying outside the province. I've had again students come to me.

In the case, for example, of students who are a couple, one of the couple needs to go away to study, needs to. What the person wants to study is not available here. In order for the couple to stay together, the other person goes also, even though, maybe the program they are doing is available here, but their reason for going is so valid, and to think they're not available for a grant. That's not acceptable, Mr. Speaker. Especially, if we're looking at trying to keep our young people here in this province.

A couple who goes away like that, a couple who goes away because one needs to go in order to further his or her education and the other goes so

that the couple can stay together. They go away and one of them finds a good job opportunity. The other one says, well, I will look for a good job opportunity too. So they stay away and they don't come back.

This government has such a short-sighted vision with regard to what our needs are. No long-term vision at all, Mr. Speaker. Long-term vision and long-term planning is what is missing. That's what I'm begging them to start doing and that's what the people of the province want, long-term planning. Not just for eliminating the deficit, long-term planning for the good of the people in the province. This is what we're looking for, Mr. Speaker.

Let's look at AESL. Eight offices were closed, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER (Dempster): Order, please!

MS. MICHAEL: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Eight offices closed in this province; eight of them last year, still closed, making it very difficult for people to access Income Support, emergency housing and other services. The government can try all it wants to say: The phone is there, you can call. Madam Speaker, it doesn't work. It is not satisfactory.

What people need is to know that they are being taken care of. They need to have continuity in terms of the people they're speaking with when they have an issue, and they don't have that continuity. They want to have some sense of security that the person they're speaking to is not just reading from a piece of paper and saying: Yeah, I know your history, but that they really –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

It's very hard when you get interrupted by shouts from the other side because one loses one's train of thought.

So talking –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

If the Speaker hears any more unnecessary noise in the Chamber, I'll name Members and you'll not be permitted to speak for the remainder of day.

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

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

Madam Speaker, the closing of the AES offices, yeah, may have saved some money for government, but it has made life more difficult for people living in rural areas, in particular, and has removed the human element from their interaction with government in having their needs met.

Thank you and I look forward to speaking again in Concurrence.

MADAM SPEAKER: The Speaker recognizes the hon. Member for St. John's Centre.

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

I'm very happy to stand and to speak for the third time on this current budget. This will be my last opportunity to be able to speak on the budget.

MR. KENT: We have one more Concurrence.

MS. ROGERS: One more Concurrence; that's not my concurrence, though.

MR. KENT: We want to hear from you, though.

MS. ROGERS: Okay, thank you very much.

I am pleased to have this one last opportunity to speak to the 2017 budget. As I've pointed out

previously, we have a serious job crisis in this province and the Liberals' plan, in fact, is for it to get worse, for the job crisis to get worse.

The economic indicators projected in the background paper on the economy paint a grim future of our prospects for the next several years.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MS. ROGERS: Madam Speaker, it's a little bit hard for me to hear myself here with all the noise in the House.

So the economic indicators projected in the background paper on the economy paints a grim future for our prospects for the next several years. Real household income, retail sales, housing starts, real GDP, capital investment, all declining continuously for the next several years; that's a grim picture. That's all part of the government's grim program, the GRI, grim program. The only indicators projected to increase are unemployment and cost of living. These are the ones that you want to see going down; but, in fact, government is telling us in the next five years unemployment will go up and cost of living will go up.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

I ask Members for their co-operation to keep the volume down in the Chamber or if you have pressing conversations, please take it outside.

Thank you.

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

MS. ROGERS: Yet the minister's Budget Speech sounded like something from an alternate reality. This is from her Budget Speech from 2017: "We are on a path to gain control of our finances" "Our focus will always be on positioning our province to be an ideal place to raise a family" "... Budget 2017 reflects progress."

Those are admirable words; that's exactly what you want a budget to be able to do. But, Madam Speaker, that's not the reality of the budget. You would have to have rose-coloured glasses on through which someone could actually read the economic indicators and still make sense of these pronouncements. Again, every indicator shows us increase in unemployment and increase in the cost of living, while all their other economic indicators are worsening.

So I'd like to take a couple of minutes to focus on the job crisis in our province because I believe, Madam Speaker, that is the worst crisis that we are going through right now. Again, government has told us in all their budget documents that the job crisis will get worse in the next five years. So we have to look at that; that's a serious statement.

We already have the highest unemployment rate in Canada. In our beloved Newfoundland and Labrador, we have the highest unemployment rate in Canada, and our jobless rate is forecast to increase every year for the next five years. So we are going to be losing more and more and more jobs in the next five years. That's a concern to all of us.

When people say they're worried about the economy, really what they're talking about is they're worried about the job crisis because they're feeling it in their communities. They are seeing it in their families. Our own public servants are worried about their own jobs. We know that we've lost a number of jobs in the public service. Public sector jobs, we have lost a lot. So that's what they're talking about when they say they're worried about the economy. They're worried about whether or not they're going to have a job.

A lot of people are worried about their adult children who may be coming out of university who can't get jobs or who are coming out of university with huge student debts and are underemployed, working at minimum wage jobs.

Where is the progress? Where is the progress in that? A place where someone is unemployed is hardly an ideal place to raise a family. Yet the minister said she's going to do everything to position our province to be an ideal place to

raise a family. How is this an ideal place right now to raise a family? And we want it so much to be so. I believe, Madam Speaker, that it can be.

Government has hyped its so-called *Way Forward* documents. Incredibly, the first *Way Forward* publication made virtually – imagine this, Madam Speaker, it's the biggest crisis that we have right now, aside from Muskrat Falls, and in their *Way Forward* document government made virtually no mention of jobs. The elephant in the room and there's no mention of jobs.

It didn't address joblessness as a problem, it didn't set a jobs target, it didn't offer any solutions and that's what government should be doing. It's not about moving numbers around on a spreadsheet, it's about having a vision for the province and coming up with solutions, and coming up with a real way forward rather than dragging us backwards. That's basically what this budget is; it's a rehash of 2016, with no relief of the damage done by *Budget 2016*.

After we rightly took government to task for this shocking omission, the second round of *Way Forward* – because it takes us pushing for government to go in the right direction – set a jobs target. That's what we wanted them to do, to set a jobs target, although it wasn't clear at all where any of these theoretical new jobs would come from – no plan, nothing concrete.

Earlier this week, Members opposite flocked into the media centre: promise of a solution. They were so excited. In they went to that media centre and the Premier's big announcement about jobs. What was it? Exactly what was that announcement about? What was all that air blowing around? What was it really about? Their Premier announced that two-thirds of his Cabinet would be working on a problem that the entire Cabinet should have been focused on – this entire Cabinet should have been focused on it for the last 17 months.

But now they're going to get two-thirds of the Cabinet together. They realize that there's a job problem. We've all known there's a job problem. It said it in the 2016 budget and it really said it in the 2017 budget. Now, after 17 months, they've woken up and they're going to get a few of their folks together and solve the

problem. Well, that's what they should have been doing from the start.

This big announcement, this flurry of activity, there was no funding put in place and no specific plans as to where new jobs would come from. It was a public relations exercise and not much more. I wish it would have been more. I wish that it was substantive. I wish that it was really a comprehensive job strategy but, no, they're saying now we're going to get together and talk about it, after 17 months. This is a huge crisis facing the province.

One thing we do know, Madam Speaker, is the public sector jobs continue to be cut in dribs and drabs; five one day, 45 another day. They're trickling down. We're getting messages in Estimates that these positions are going to be gone. Those are gone by attrition. These ones haven't been filled in a while. Therefore, zero-based budgeting means we'll take those off the spreadsheet. Those jobs will just disappear because they haven't been filled in a while. That's what they're doing in dribs and drabs. They are cutting jobs.

We still haven't had a straight answer from the Premier or his Minister of Finance as to how many public sector jobs will disappear as a result of the budget. We can't get a handle on those numbers. Not because any of us are stupid, it's because government aren't being really forthright about it.

In fact, the minister gets indignant when we ask and accuses us of fear mongering. Getting to know the actuality is not fear mongering. It is really fear mongering in a debate on a provincial budget to ask a simple question? Is this fear mongering? How many public sector jobs will be lost as a result of the budget? That allays people's fears when they know for sure what's happening, when they know for sure what the plan is, what the future looks like.

Madam Speaker, our job is to ask those questions. That's why we're here. We have to ask those questions, and it's the minister's job to answer those questions. We also know what the knock-off effect of those public sector job losses will be. How many private sector jobs will disappear as a result of the public sector layoffs? How does that square with this week's photo op

on jobs? Because that's what it was, it was a photo op.

It's not a coincidence that with projected increases in unemployment and reductions in household income over the next few years that the spinoff of that is that retail sales are projected to decline year after year as well. So we're seeing the rollout effect of that. It's not benign. We lose job, higher unemployment, reduction in household income, people have less money to buy things. People have less money to buy things; therefore, retail outlets have to lay off people – again, more jobs. It's a spiral downward.

As retail sales decline, does anyone think the retail sector will be able to retain current levels of employment, let alone increase them? No way. So how can anyone describe this downward spiral as progress? It's not progress. It's not growth. It's not even maintaining our status quo. We are spiraling downwards, but it doesn't have to be this way. That's the thing, Madam Speaker, it doesn't have to be this way.

We all know the fear in our relative communities; the people who are afraid of job losses, who know what's happening in their communities because of the drop in household income, because of the increase in unemployment. We all know it. We know it in our families. We know it in our communities. We know it province wide. People are telling us and we can see it.

Madam Speaker, the Premier indicated in media interviews following the uproar over last year's budget that he would make last year's budget decisions over again. That he would do that again. Well, that's one promise he kept.

Budget 2017, for all practical purposes, is *Budget 2016* all over again. It's a rehash. Warmed up hash, that's all it is. It's a rehash. The biggest difference is the political spin attached to this year's budget – they did a better job on the spin – was designed to obscure the bad news. Although they did mitigate some of the effects of the levy, but that's only because those of us on this side of the House pushed so hard, as did the people of the province, they had to push government to do the right thing.

Madam Speaker, household incomes are expected to decline. Unemployment is expected to increase and electricity rates are poised to go right through the roof when the ill-advised Muskrat Falls Project is complete. Already, though, even earlier than that based on hydro's request for a whooping rate increase.

We have employment going down, unemployment going up, household income going down and power rates, electricity rates skyrocketing. It's the antithesis of prosperity. It's the antithesis of growth. It's choking the people of our province and they're feeling it. We know they're feeling it.

So how does this represent progress? Is this progress? I wouldn't want to be going backwards. This is not progress. At a time when the people of the province are desperately looking for vision and hope, we have a budget that offers neither.

Now, government may call us fear mongering and negative, but, Madam Speaker, the opposite is true. We know that only by acknowledging the challenges and barriers that we can come up with real workable solutions. That's the only way to be able to design real workable solutions.

Government's been at the helm now for 17 months and haven't come up with any solutions. Their solutions are only about moving numbers around on a spreadsheet. That is not a budget. Those are not solutions for the current fiscal reality that we face. It's not simply about moving numbers around on a spreadsheet; it's not simply about zero-based budgeting.

I say it's time now for government to call an all-party committee on jobs because they have shown, government has already shown over the past 17 months they can't do it alone. The people of the province know that this government can't do it on their own.

Government has already shown us over these past 17 months that they don't have any solutions. The only thing they've done is last week or this week they've pulled together and said, hey, we're going to start talking about it, after 17 months. We know they don't have it in them to do it alone. The people of the province

know they can't do it alone. I know they can't do it alone. They have proven that.

Our beloved Newfoundland and Labrador belongs to us all, as does our future. Our future belongs to us all. Government should do the right thing and call for an all-party committee to develop a job strategy in conjunction – not just an all-party committee but in conjunction – with a citizens' assembly. I believe this crisis is big enough that it warrants an all-party committee and it warrants a citizens' assembly to deal with this problem. We have to develop a job strategy to help our province really move forward, not backwards in the direction that this government has been taking us all in.

Madam Speaker, we need all hands on deck, including private industry, academia and the general population, to pull together to design a real recovery strategy. What we need is a strategy of recovery, a strategy that will in fact compel us forward. We cannot afford not to do this. We did it with mental health and addictions and I know that we can do this with our job and economic crisis.

Madam Speaker, I would be more than happy – I would absolutely be more than happy to sit on such a committee. We cannot afford to not do this; we need all hands on deck. I believe we can. I know we can. We must. We have no choice but to come up with real workable solutions. Government has proven to us they cannot do it alone, they cannot go it alone. We need all hands on deck.

This time, time is of the essence. We don't have any time to waste here. There is no time to waste, so let's roll up our sleeves and let's work together. The solutions do rest in us coming together. As the great late Jacky Layton said, don't let them tell you it can't be done.

I believe, Madam Speaker, that it can be done. I believe that it must be done. I believe that working together, because that's what we have to do, because we are in a job crisis, we are going backwards, it's time to change the direction, to pull our people together, to pull together a citizens' assembly, to pull together an all-party committee to look at our jobs and economy strategy.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Seeing no further speakers –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MADAM SPEAKER: The Speaker recognizes the hon. Member for Topsail – Paradise.

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

I apologize for being slow getting up; I thought the Members opposite may rise and speak to the budget this afternoon and I was giving them an opportunity to do just that.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak back on the main motion. I have spoken for two hours already on the budget. I'm going to speak for another hour now this afternoon, which is we are back on the main motion and I get an hour to speak this afternoon and I'll use my time this afternoon to speak to the budget as I've done before.

Madam Speaker, there's so much information and so much material and items that I'd like to use my time to cover, but there's no way that I can cover them all. One of the aspects of the budget that people ask me about from time to time and they'll say: I haven't heard much about the budget. I haven't heard a lot of detail about the budget. How's the budget different from last year?

Madam Speaker, the budget is not a lot different from last year; it's essentially the same budget as last year, with one exception being the reduction on gas tax. There's a bill scheduled to come before the House this spring to make an effort to partially reduce the gas tax. As we've said, they actually had actually 350 new fees and increased fees – there are 300 increased fees and 50 new fees; 300 became the number that people used. We said we it's still 299½ on the books, so they reduced half a fee.

As a government who has said that they have to reduce the cost of operations and when we drill down on all of the budget material, even from the high level, you see what the difference in the cost of programs and services from last year to this year, you really have to search really, really

closely to find what government is doing to actually reduce the cost of government and the operations of government.

Back in 2014, 2015, we talked about reductions through attrition, but we also started a program within government departments to look at how synergies and efficiencies could be created. We know that in 2013, the government of the day – having seen a decline in revenues occurring – took steps to reduce the size of public service all in one year, and we know it was a tough year. It was a tough year in doing so. While all the intentions were right and it came from criticism, especially from Members opposite who said it was the wrong thing to do. You shouldn't cut jobs at a time when you were in an economic downturn. We shouldn't reduce spending and we should increase investments.

Those types of commentaries came from the Opposition of the day who, for the most part, is now in government. Then in '14 there was a further reduction in the size of core public service, and again in '15. We're not sure where it is now though. I know the hon. minister tabled some documentation this afternoon. I haven't had an opportunity to go through that as of yet and it will show some of – she referred to as reductions a result of a Flatter, Leaner Management System. I'm glad she's tabled that. We'd be interested to know what the entire impact is, the entire efforts of government, and what those total numbers are.

We asked questions just a few days ago. My colleague for Ferryland asked questions just a few days ago – yesterday actually – on the previous documentation that was tabled by the Minister of Finance here in the House which showed I think it was a further 200 positions that were planned to be eliminated through '16-'17. What the Member has tabled today and spoke about earlier after Question Period was some of that.

One of the aspects of a budget is to understand how people are feeling about it, how are people feeling about the actions of government and what they're doing. Madam Speaker, we've seen some interesting, I think, good things happen. I know the Minister of Municipal Affairs made an announcement yesterday about partnership with municipalities. I think it's great for him to do

that; he does it very well. I'm glad he's doing that and it's important to partner with municipalities, even though they have concern about the change in ratios this year.

Many of them are saying we can't do the work that we had hoped to do or planned to do because they're going to get less work done for the funding you had available – not in all circumstances, but in some categories of operations they will not be able to complete the work that they wanted to.

But they are continuing to have those relationships and you have to have those. In tough times and in good times, you have to try and have those relationships. I know from my own past experience that sometimes it can be challenging to do that.

They made and discussed some of their actions and some of the things they wanted to do, taking the politics out of appointments. We've had significant discussion here in the House on taking the politics out of appointments. We see another announcement today on appointments by the Independent Appointments Commission to the Newfoundland and Labrador Liquor Corporation. Two out of three people who I know enough about to speak about are good, quality people on their appointments. They, I think, will bring value to the Newfoundland and Labrador Liquor board, or the liquor agency and the liquor board and how they operate. The board itself will be enhanced by some of those appointments.

The problem that people become cynical about is that the government and the Premier had said that they were going to take the politics out of appointments, period, campaigned on taking the politics out of appointments. We're not going to make any more political appointments. They quite often stand up here and they talk about appointments that we made. Political appointments have happened since the beginning of time in history. There has been some really good work done by those appointments to agencies, boards and commissions, volunteer based types of appointments in large part, and how they've operated and functioned and some of the good work that they've done.

The government said they're going to change that. They brought forward the Independent Appointments Commission bill last year and laid it out to government and laid it out to the House of Assembly; a signature bill, going to take the politics out of appointments. The bill was no sooner passed when we saw something happening in the public service that was completely unexpected and somewhat disingenuous from what they had said they were going to do when it comes to appointments.

When you say you're going to take politics out of appointments and you include agencies, boards and commissions and certain extensions certain of those positions, but you exclude positions that traditionally have not been political appointments in such a way, with the full intention of making and politicizing those appointments, it becomes problematic and people become cynical about it. The clerk is an example of one that we've talked about which was clearly a partisan appointment.

I haven't been able to find anywhere in the country, Madam Speaker – and if someone can find it, please send it to me – where a clerk of the Executive Council was a previous candidate for the leadership of the party in power. I can't find anywhere where anything like that ever happened before.

When we look at the legislation, conflict of interest legislation, we look at the public service legislation, you'll see the comments have been, oh, it's outdated, it doesn't deal with that kind of position, because I don't think anybody ever anticipated that type of an appointment would ever be done or would ever take place because it's been just an accepted practice that the public service not be politicized.

Now, people are going say: Oh, well, you appointed this one to – you have certain persons in your staff who were political appointments. Madam Speaker, those appointments, there are people who work in the Premier's office and in ministerial offices as political staffers who are that. They are political staffers, but there's a separation from political staffers and a public service.

I've explained this to some people over the last number of weeks who weren't clear about it

before, and I've explained it to them because there are different branches of our government. There's a judicial branch. There's an Executive Branch. There's a legislative branch. We're in a legislative branch.

Members of the House of Assembly are also responsible for the Executive Branch and run the Executive Branch of government. Then there's the judicial branch; the judiciary, the courts which run independent from government. Government will not have influence or say over policing or enforcement, or shouldn't. They're not supposed to have say over policing and enforcement and what they investigate or who they investigate or how they investigate them. As well as what happens in our judiciary, what happens in courtrooms and so on should be handed off from government's control completely.

The public service is the people who are hired, non-partisan appointments. There are people in public service I'm sure that are members of all – I'm not sure, I know, are members of all parties or support all parties, but their employment should not be done on a partisan basis. It should be done based on skills and qualifications and hire and so on. People have a right to be associated with or support a political party privately and independently without threat or fear of reprisal because they don't support the governing party. It's the way it's supposed to be.

When the government starts to make political appointments, people who are known, long-time supporters of the governing party, then the politics starts to work into the fabric of government. They are different from the Premier appointing Cabinet ministers. He can appoint whoever he likes to the Cabinet. That's a political process, from political staff. That's a political process.

We have political staff in my office who are very partisan because that's what they do. The Premier has political staff in his office who are very partisan because their role is a political and partisan one, but when it comes to the public service then it should be separate.

Through government, you have the leader of the government who is the Premier; it's the highest position in government. You have the leader of

the public service, which is the clerk. While they work together and have a relationship, one is political and one is not. That's the way our system of government works, and that's the way our system is supposed to work.

We've seen in the last year, while they passed their Independent Appointments Commission legislation, they made a number of appointments – I don't, to this day, believe we know all of them. We know they haven't announced many of these. We found out through other ways of some of these appointments.

You have a former Liberal MHA, a former Liberal candidate, former Liberal leadership candidate, former Liberal political assistant, former Liberal political assistant, former Liberal candidate, a former Liberal party executive member, a former Liberal executive member who was also a campaign chair back in 2015, a number of Liberal party executive, a candidate, a candidate and so on, a staffer who has now been put in the public service. That's one of the reasons why people are very cynical and become very cynical about this government and the actions they've done. They say they're going to do one thing and they do something completely different.

Today in Question Period we had – I know Question Period there's a lot of bantering and so on that happens in Question Period, but that's where the serious matters and important matters are quite often raised, and it's what most people, the media and so on, keep closest eye on. We asked about the EY report. Back on December 21 – someone is saying, what's the EY report about?

Back on December 21, 2015, a very, very, short period time after government came into power, there was an announcement by government and the headline is government opens books on the Muskrat Falls Project. The Premier announced, as well as the Minister of Natural Resources, that the provincial government is undertaking independent review of the cost schedule associated with the risk of Muskrat Falls Project.

The quote here from the Premier indicates it will be Ernst & Young, known as EY now, will undertake a comprehensive independent review and identify opportunities for corrective action.

That's what's right in the release of December 21. The release also says the process will be completed by March 2016.

So we were asking today, in April last year an interim or draft report was made available by Ernst & Young to government. We've asked where's the finalized report? It's now 14 months past due, and the minister has talked about how they're working with EY to finalize the interim report. Actually, her words yesterday in the House, and I quote: "The Oversight Committee is now working with EY to finalize the interim report."

The Oversight Committee is their committee who is providing oversight on the project, and reports, I'm pretty sure it was pretty much monthly last year in – give credit to the Oversight Committee, I'm pretty sure it was every month. It was 11 times last year they actually had a meeting and reviewed the project. They're now working with EY who is providing an independent overview of the process.

What's also interesting, while we have a government who campaigned on openness and transparency, and slammed the previous administration – they do that every day in government, in the House here, they talk about the previous administration this, the previous administration that. They'd rather talk about us then talk about the things they've done, and that's their strategy, Mr. Speaker.

Their Oversight Committee reports have never been released. Eleven months since December of 2015, the month that they took office, there has not been a single Oversight Committee report released by government, not a single report. They also have the EY report which they're continuing to work on to finalize this, what's supposed to be an independent report.

We raised that in Question Period because we quite often measure the questions we ask and decide on what questions we ask, because we have tons of material, areas and so on, that we'd like to raise in the House but there's not enough time during Question Period. There's not enough time in Question Period to get to all the matters but we quite often take a process where we understand what is timely and important to people, what people want to know about. We

reflect on the response we receive from Newfoundlanders and Labradorians as well who quite often write us and contact us and talk to us about what they're hearing in the House of Assembly.

I just read a letter this afternoon, handwritten letter from an individual who's a pensioner asking certain questions about what's happening with pension plans and so on. That's quite normal. I say, Mr. Speaker, a little bit different from what my experience was when I was in government. While I was in government they worked really hard to try and find out what was on people's minds, how people felt about it and they quite often shared that, but in Opposition we get a lot more of that than we used to.

We get a lot more response from people than I used to anyway. I can't speak for all the others but I think generally speaking in discussions I've had with my colleagues it's generally the same. Quite often you get people calling us and tell us things that are happening in departments and who are concerned about it. Who are upset about actions or directives or change in process or policy, or things that are taking place in government departments. They quite often call us on a confidential basis because they have a concern about what's happening or they have an objection to it.

Sometimes they'll call us to say a good thing is going on but most of the time when they call us it's based on a concern, and we hear from people all over the province who have them as well. They quite often go to their MHA or contact the department to try and get answers, and when they don't get it – or assistance and support – they quite often come to the Opposition.

It was no different, Mr. Speaker, before the election of 2015. People would come to the Opposition, a different party in Opposition, because they weren't satisfied with the response from the government of the day when we were in power. But that happens in Opposition. It was a little bit unexpected by me to expect such communications that we do receive, but we certainly do.

One of the really consistent aspects of the information we receive from people is how cynical they really are about politics, about

government of the day, but about how government has operated, how it's maintained, how people make promises and commitments and then they don't always live up to them, such as the partisan appointments that I just talked about a few minutes ago.

Mr. Speaker, I want to point out, too, because I know Members opposite refer to this from time to time, and I want to make it clear to people in the province as well that we don't come to the House and take on the personal experience, qualifications and such of some of these people. It's not about that. It's not about the qualifications of people or what their experience or background is, what their history is. It's about a process; it's about the process used to put those people in positions. That's what we question. We question the process used.

We know that through the Flatter, Leaner Management System that government introduced last year that they set up a two-tiered process. They went into some areas of government and said you, you, you, you're gone, as part of the flatter, leaner system; walked them out the door, which you do when you terminate management employees like that. But they also went in and went you, you and you, you now have to compete against each other for a new position we're creating of a lesser position.

The other thing we saw, which I talked about a few minutes ago – and we don't have full openness on this yet, but we continue to pick up tidbits of information – is where they've gone in and vacated positions, removed people from positions and then, subsequent to that, either filled the position with a partisan appointment, for the same position, or changed the position slightly or a small amount and put a partisan appointment in it.

We have a growing list of those types of circumstances. Again, I'm not making it about those people, but that causes people to be cynical and upset. I spoke to someone in a department recently who expressed they understand government comes in, they do different things differently and then my colleague, who I really liked and was well appreciated and so on, got cut. Then there was someone brought in who backfilled that work and that upset the people in the workplace. They

felt that was wrong in the workplace. But they can't say anything about it because they fear for anything that could happen from doing so.

Mr. Speaker, we've gone through budget documents at some length and during two-week Easter break, we did that. We sought outside assistance as well and opinions and so on. There are a couple parts of the budget, but one part of the budget which we talk about fairly regularly because we hear from community-based organizations and groups, service organizations and so through the province that are asking about the grants and wonder and worry about what's going to happen with the grants.

We know last year there was a significant reduction in many grants. The government actually provided fairly significant information to the public. They did so with the changes in fees that they provided last year, but they've also provided information to groups and organizations about changes in grants and so on.

While there are a couple of different kinds of grants, there are grants that organizations have received over and over for many years and there are grants that they apply for throughout the year. So they have a base amount of funding that they expect and receive every year. Most have been impacted by a reduction and a cut in those, not only last year but in the last number of years. Then there are also the other one-offs that they can apply for and that, right now, is unknown in many cases. There is some that are starting to be known, that we're hearing from people saying okay, we've got assurance that we're going to be okay on this and this and this, but we're not sure of other aspects.

That creates that whole issue, that whole problem of knowing what the future holds for the province. That adds to that problem. Because it wasn't that long ago that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians had a spring in their step. They felt good about themselves, they felt good about living here and they felt good about the communities and the opportunities were abundant and so on.

That's changed significantly. It's changed significantly. People don't feel the same way anymore. There was a poll came out yesterday which talked about people's confidence and part

of it was talking about the confidence people have in the economy, do they plan on making major purchases and so on. I think it's very telling. It's very, very telling. I've spoken in this House many, many times now about businesses such as those in home renovation business. Car sales, home renovations and upgrades and home sales and so on are all really good benchmarks to look at.

One real estate agent talked publicly recently and said that prices are down 6 per cent in the first quarter of 2017. If you think on a \$325,000 home, that's a \$20,000 drop in price in three months – just in a three-month period. That's a \$20,000 drop in price in three months, one-quarter of the entire year.

Also there was a lot of discussion about housing starts being down all over, but also discussions then about sales and how sales have fallen off. People are resistant, or so the observers believe, because of the unknowns that are ahead for the province, unknowns for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, the unknowns for jobs. People are hesitant to make significant commitments in what, for most people, is the biggest investment in their life by purchasing a home or a new home. People are hesitant to do that.

I know on the market today there are a significant number of homes that if you look on the ad channels or if you go online and you look at real estate listings, it's amazing how many are vacant. Either vacant because they were rentals that are no longer rented or vacant because people are either moved out, moved away or have downsized or changed their home. There is a lot vacant there as well. I think it speaks to the feeling in the province today, the confidence that people have in the future of the province today. I think it speaks to that.

When you hear of businesses that are struggling today that have done well for so long and they're struggling today – I've talked about kitchen cabinets and those types of businesses whose business has dropped off significantly. That whole spiral begins. I know people understand how that happens because the whole spiral begins of, well, I'm a public servant, I'm not sure – I'll use public servants as an example – what's in my future. I'm not sure what's going to happen to my job in the future, so I better wait

to find out. We know there are still more reductions and cuts that are happening and I better wait to find out because I don't want to make a big investment.

I don't want to redo my kitchen. I don't want to replace my roof. I don't want to tear off my patio that I was going to replace or build a new fence. I'm not going to buy a new car; I'll fix my old one. I'm not going to replace the windows or siding that I've been planning to do for a number of years because I'm not sure where my job is going to be in the future. I'm not sure where my spouse's job or partner's job is going to be in the future, so I'm going to play it cool for another little while. Then that takes money out of the economy and puts it in people's pocket. They have less to put in their pocket anyway because they're paying a higher level of taxes.

We've heard it through people going into the tax season who are looking at their tax forms and have said now we've got to pay the levy. A lot of people call it a tax for living in Newfoundland and Labrador. Instead of that money filtering through the economy, providing a job, driving the economy and circulating through the economy, it now goes directly from a person's paycheque into government coffers.

Mr. Speaker, Members opposite have said for many, many years that it was the wrong thing to do; heavily criticized us. In 2015, I said, as premier when we did our budget in 2015, we're going to have to increase the HST and we had to take efforts to reduce the size of government and the cost to government.

We were heavily criticized for it and told over and over and over, no, it's not the time to do it. Don't do that; it's wrong. We did it in a very minimal way compared to what people are facing today. We did it in a very minimal way, but now that that's happened it's had a big impact on people.

Some believe, Mr. Speaker, that by the budget being duplicated from last year to this year that it's okay. We know that the budget was a shock last year to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We know that once the shock was over and people settled down, it becomes the norm. Then when the budget came this year and people said

good, no extra taxes and fees, they were relieved. But they shouldn't be relieved because you're still burdened by those same taxes that you were shocked about last year. And you're still restricted in your spending at a greater level than you were last year. You shouldn't be relieved that there were no new taxes.

I'd say after 350 taxes and fees that had an impact on government or on people, that there was no other fees or taxes that actually could be put on people, that it was going to be a budget I predicted – I bumped into a person a little while ago who said: You were right, Paul; there was no extra new taxes and fees. I said: Well, there couldn't be. It was going to be hold-the-line kind of budget.

But there are differences in the budget. We talked about it today in Question Period, some differences in the budget. There are some differences that have taken place in the budget. We've talked about the deficit reduction targets and how there was a buffer built in last year and there's a buffer built in next year, but there's no buffer this year.

The Minister of Finance is on the record as saying we have a higher level of reliability in the numbers this year. I don't know how that's different from the reliability of last year or next year that it is different from this year. But that's the minister's position that it's a higher level of reliability. She may have made some other comments that escape me right now, but I'm sure she'll correct me, as time permits.

We know that the economic indicators for the future are telling and are concerning to many when they look at the fact that household income is going to decline; we look at the fact that the cost of goods and services will increase; spending is going to decline as well. I'm just looking for the sheet that I had right from the budget; I don't seem to have it there but right from the budget were economic indicators. People's incomes are going to go down but the cost to live here is going to go up.

Mr. Speaker, just today I received a message from a Newfoundlander and Labradorian, very heartfelt message to me to advise me – he actually says: I'm sorry to say that my wife and my child and I have made the decision to move

out of Newfoundland and Labrador – a Newfoundland and Labrador family that has decided to move on and actually move to southern Ontario. It goes on, in his message to me, he says: But the events of the last 18 months have really pushed our decision: being taxed to death, yet having some of the worst roads; access to health care, in-class resources and seeing there's no end in sight. That, I think, is one of the key words here: There's no end in sight. And we're puzzled as to why we are staying or anyone for that matter is staying here. Bound for southern Ontario, and articulates doing it with a heavy heart.

Mr. Speaker, these are young families who should be the future of our province that are saying there's nothing here for me anymore. There's nothing here for me to stay in this province anymore and there's no reason for me to continue to live in Newfoundland and Labrador. I think it's a good example of a bad circumstance.

I just got this today and I was really saddened and personally saddened to read it. A fine young man – I don't know his family, I can't speak for his family but this man is a fine young man and talented, young Newfoundlander and Labradorian who's packing up his family and moving to Ontario.

Not that they have a commitment of a job in the future, they feel there is nothing left here for them and they need somewhere else to go and has decided to pack up and go to southern Ontario to make a life for him and his family. They're gone, and that's another family leaving our province.

Government's own documents indicate and forecast that that's going to happen over the next number of years, over the next five years. But it's unfortunate the government is not talking about it. Everyone please hold on. Please stay here. Please hang tough with us. We're turning it around. We're going to be better. It's going to be better. Don't leave; stay here with us. Don't leave. But we don't hear that. There's no encouragement to say there's a better road ahead or a better day ahead, so people are going to pack up and they're leaving.

One of the problems, Madam Speaker, as I said earlier, is about the belief in the future. But we've heard so much where we're going to do one thing and something else is done. We do one thing but we actually do something else. The government does something completely different.

We've had so many experiences with the government over the last 18 months that people are just shaking their heads. The most recent one on Mr. Coffey – the Premier stands by it. I'm not blaming Mr. Coffey. Mr. Coffey shouldn't have put himself in the position, and I'm sure understood a conflict of interest, but the Premier – as the Premier – allowed it to happen. The buck stops at his door; he allowed it to happen. He allowed a conflict of interest, stood by it and said no, it's not a conflict of interest and I'm okay with it.

I asked him if Mr. Coffey didn't resign, would he still be here today. Of course, the Premier is not going to answer the question. I know it's would be very difficult, impossible question to answer and that indicates to me that's a position that he's created. He understands it's a difficult position.

But putting a person in that position, such a conflict of interest, and people are just left shaking their heads – we saw last year upset, people irate, protests, people angry and so on, and I predicted earlier this year in talking to my own colleagues, I said we're not going to see that this year because I don't believe they're going to see much in differences in the budget. People are going to be relieved it wasn't worse – and we saw that as well – but what we're seeing now people are kind of going ah, here we go again, what are they doing, you just can't trust them.

The Premier stands by it. The Premier could have easily said, in hindsight, I should not have done this; I should have been more careful. There was so much coming at me, we were really busy, I should have focused on this more carefully, I should not have allowed this to happen, and it was wrong for me to do that.

Most people, I think, would have said good for you. You're accepting the responsibility of the decision you made, you are reflecting on it and

you're dealing with it. That could have been said but instead you just simply stand by it.

It came out on 21 of April, we first knew about it through www.allNewfoundlandandLabrador.com, a subscription news service in the province. *The Telegram* followed up the following week in a story. We know there were meetings all through the weekend. The Premier said there were meetings throughout the weekend and Sunday night, late Sunday night, the announcement comes that the clerk had resigned; Monday he held a press conference, said there were seven files, two that had conflict of interest.

We had Question Period on Monday, Question Period on Tuesday – the Premier complained that we were still asking these repeated questions and so on. On Wednesday, half-way through Question Period on Wednesday, or well into it, anyway, I think we were 14-15 minutes in, so just about half-way through Question Period on Wednesday when the Premier blurts out that the clerk had actually settled a claim with government on behalf of a private client. That he was representing the private client against government and he had actually settled that claim.

The Premier wonders, you know, questions and criticizes why we're asking repeated questions. Of course we're asking repeated questions because, three days later, we found out something new that had not been disclosed before. Again, people go, oh, why didn't he say it on Monday when he held his press conference? Why didn't he disclose it in Question Period on Monday afternoon? Instead of saying there were seven, only two in a conflict of interest – well, it turns out that wasn't accurate. We don't know if it was eight and three or if it was seven, or three of the seven were a conflict. We don't know, and we didn't find out until Wednesday.

That causes people to say: How can we trust them when you go in and you ask questions over and over and over and over – last year after the former CEO, Ed Martin, was fired from Nalcor, we asked questions day after day after day. As the day after day after day went by, we slowly found out more. So instead of being open and transparent and upfront about it first, it takes

days and days and days to get the information. So people learn you can't trust him.

I remember the first big one that the media spent a lot of time on and people talked about – which, in the big scope of things, was probably a minor matter but a lot of people had interest in it. We know there are two big topics in Newfoundland and Labrador, historically, we want to talk about: politics and religion. It had to do with the quote, unquote Christian flag in Easter last year.

The Premier said: No, there's no policy. He put the Christian flag up, very controversial flag in Newfoundland and Labrador, very controversial within many denominations and put the flag up and said there was no policy. I said: Yeah, there was policy, because I saw the policy when I was there before. We said: Yeah, there was policy. No, no, no policy. Through ATIPP, we find out the Premier didn't have the policy.

So people ask: Why did he stand up and just say it's not so? Why did he just stand there and say there's no policy when we find out, weeks later, there actually was a policy? Why did the Premier say, when there were resign posters up on the parkway, that no one in my office did anything to try and have those signs removed, had anything to do with having those posters removed? Through ATIPP and later we find out, well actually they did. One of your staff did make an effort and make inquiries about having those signs removed with the university. So to say that was disingenuous, and people shrugged their shoulders in saying why is this Premier doing this, how do we trust him. How can we trust the Premier and what the Premier says?

Eighteen months later, Madam Speaker, we find ourselves in the circumstances where people are waving the white flag and they're just saying: That's it, I've had enough. I've had enough. I've had enough of what's going on in our province. I've had enough of this. I don't know what's in the future for me. I'm concerned about our future. I'm concerned about there's no future for me personally here. I can't make a living here anymore and I'm leaving. If housing prices are continuing in the wrong direction, I'm going to try and sell my house now before it gets worse, or I'm going to bring the keys back and give them to the bank. I'm going to do those kinds of things.

We know bankruptcies are gone through the roof. You expect that sometimes when you have your projects within economies that drive economy and support economies and so on, when you have projects where large numbers of skilled tradespeople work and then that work goes, then a few months later you'll see they've overextended themselves in many ways. You'll see people that have bought a trailer or a new truck or a couple of trucks or a new home and they're saying now that I've lost that high income that I had, I really can't afford it anymore and then they have to find a way out of it. You see that as well.

We're seeing it now right through the entire province where people are impacted and where people are deciding I've had enough – I've just had enough of it. We throw up our arms over here from time to time with we just can't get an answer. There you go; we just can't get an answer.

I saw early this morning a video from the House of Commons yesterday. I thought it's kind of reflective of some of the experiences that we've had. We know that there's a polling period started now and we expect to see good-news announcements over the next couple of weeks. I expect to see that from government.

We know the Liberal government in PEI, the minister of the government in PEI accidentally tabled in their legislature an email from the premier's office telling them to do their good-news announcements during the polling period. We know that they have very close relationships, all the Liberal governments and premiers and leaders and so on.

The Premier has said how much he loves Justin Trudeau, he has said. He loves the relationship with him and so on, but the Premier and the provincial government has to represent Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. He should represent Newfoundlanders and Labradorians before all else. They should absolutely do that.

We had the announcement of the new Ocean Frontier – is it called frontier? I ask the Member for Mount Pearl North: Is it frontier? They've gone to Dalhousie.

MR. KENT: Yeah, something like that.

MR. P. DAVIS: Yeah, that's gone to Dalhousie which the centre for ocean technology. There's been so much investment over the last, probably, 30 years or 40 years here in Newfoundland and Labrador; Memorial University, the Marine Institute, marketing our province as a gateway to the North, being experts in the field and now we see that the federal government is moving the centre of all of that to Dalhousie in downtown Halifax.

We wonder what did our provincial government to make efforts to have Newfoundland and Labrador as the centre instead of Nova Scotia, but we don't know. We don't know because we just don't have that information. It hasn't been provided to us.

We know that we worked very hard for the Fisheries Fund. Members opposite like to say oh yes, you had a big do and you didn't invite – the federal government didn't come and all the dickens, all the political banter they want. There was an agreement in place. Everybody who looks at it – even the NDP says there was a deal. Even today, the Liberal prime minister says there was a deal and that he would honour the deal.

We've slowly found out what happened, Madam Speaker, because we know that in Nova Scotia, the Premier of Nova Scotia went to Ottawa and fought against the Newfoundland and Labrador fishery fund. Because of the work that he did, the new Atlantic fund was created. Instead of the \$280 million and \$120 million agreement for a \$400 million agreement, there's a new \$320 million agreement that allows for all Atlantic Canada.

It was only Newfoundland and Labrador that had a long-standing policy on processing. It was only Newfoundland and Labrador had that: MPRs, Minimum Processing Requirements. We talk about it all the time. MPRs mean fish has landed on the wharf in Newfoundland and Labrador and is processed in Newfoundland and Labrador; it can't be taken out. The European Union, through CETA, the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, didn't want that included anymore. They wanted that taken out of CETA. We said well, if you want to do that, then we want a chance to refresh, renew and update the fishery.

There were five pillars that the fund was built around and now we learn that it was all coming – the prime minister has committed to it. Now we learn that Nova Scotia went to Ottawa and fought for the fund to become an Atlantic fund instead of Newfoundland and Labrador fund.

The Members opposite are going to say well, look at all that we have for Newfoundland and Labrador when it comes to the fishery. Look what we got for the Coast Guard. The Coast Guard wasn't part of that fund that we negotiated. But the Coast Guard – I know it's an important part of the fishery, it's important to fish harvesters while they're on the water, but it's not about the fishery itself. They're going to talk about other aspects of investments that have been made here in the province that are separate and would have been separate from that fund anyway.

If we have a good relationship with our federal government, that's a good thing. I've worked hard to grow relations with other provinces. I still have good relations with other provinces and other premiers. Also, I've worked hard to grow a relationship with the federal parties as well. It's important to have those relationships but it shouldn't be to the detriment of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. It shouldn't be to the detriment of our province, our economy and our rural communities; it should be to the benefit of our communities that that happens.

I understand the position the government is in but they've got to be careful. It has to be Newfoundland and Labrador first. They can't be just silent on some of these matters that are so important and allow some of those opportunities just to slip through our fingers. That's what's most important, is to stand up for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Take a stand to prevent people like my friend who sent me a message today and announced he was leaving. Take a stand to say to these people: Please don't leave. Give us a chance to work with you and stay here in Newfoundland and Labrador. Let's find a way to keep you here in the province. If you're thinking about going, please don't. Stay here.

There's no one reaching out to people encouraging them not to go. There's no one saying we've got a bright future ahead. There's no one saying: We're working, here's our plan. Here's where we're going to be, where we see ourselves in 24 or 36 or 48 months. There's no plan to say this is what the plan of where we're going to be in that length of time. It's not where we see our circumstances going to be. So please stay and do that because we're a good place to live and we're a beautiful province, and we are all that.

I know they had an announcement this week on a jobs announcement. All the responses from it were positive to a short degree in that there was very little detail from the government on how it's going to create a new committee. It's going to be an effort for government to create new jobs.

We don't know how it's going to happen, though. We don't know how those jobs are going to be created; we don't know how it's going to operate. There were a lot of unknowns again and there are a lot of unknowns in the budget, but a lot of unknowns. If it's an effort to create jobs and it's successful, well, good for them.

It's agriculture and aquaculture. We've invested heavily in aquaculture in this province during our years in government. I'm glad, Madam Speaker, to see that the government is going to continue with those investments, going to continue with the industry because I think there's still potential for the industry. As technology evolves and understanding evolves, then the industry should evolve with it, and government should lead and guide and support that evolution of the aquaculture industry.

The Minister of Business has talked numerous times about tourism and the great tourism products we have in our province. No two ways about it, Madam Speaker, no two ways about it, we have a top-notch tourism opportunity here in Newfoundland and Labrador. We believed as a government that there are big gains to be made in tourism as well.

We laid out a plan in 2009 and a commitment to say we're going to continue to work with tourism to double the tourism dollars that come

to our province. I'm glad the government and the minister are continuing with that, with those efforts. I know they're going to change programs slightly and put their own look and feel and so on to the efforts, and I respect that, but we over here are glad to hear that the government is going to continue with tourism.

When I travelled around the province over the last number of years, last few years, I always try to find B&Bs to stay in. I find it the most wonderful opportunity, the most wonderful experience that you can have, and there are some fabulous B&B operators. I know an older couple down in – the Member for Bonavista, I'm sure, will know maybe who I'm talking about when I talk about them, but it was an older couple who had a B&B down there. They had it for about 16 or 17 years, if memory serves me correct. They decided to pass it on to their daughter and partner who have taken it over and completely revitalized the bed and breakfast, completely.

They sunk a great investment into it, to renew it and update it and so on. An absolutely beautiful experience, and they got that real good Newfoundland and Labrador ability to host, to entertain, to cook and provide for their guests, and they do a fantastic job. That's only one example. I try to stay there whenever I go down the Bonavista area because it's such a great business. I know them personally, and they do such a great business. So I always try to support their business anytime I go down in that region.

I mentioned the aquaculture and growth. I want to mention the aquaculture, too, because I think a little bit further, because I do believe there's huge potential to grow the industry. Years ago, and my colleague from Ferryland has talked to me, and Cape St. Francis has talked to me about this in the past, because years ago – and the Member for Cape St. Francis has worked in the fishing industry since he was a child and he's talked about that.

He talks about the frozen block cod they used to sell one time. They used to produce and sell this frozen block cod because that's what the market was for. Not a lot different than going to your local grocery store and buying frozen beef or frozen pork, because that's what the market was and that was the expectation. Today, we all expect to go to a grocery store – in the urban

areas and in remote locations certainly not the same way, but in urban areas people expect to go to a grocery store and have fresh meat selections, good grades of beef and pork and so on that are fresh and available, not frozen on the store shelves.

The fishing industry has come the same way. People, especially markets outside of our province, no longer expect that frozen block cod to be the good product. They want fresh cod. They want fresh fish. They want fresh seafood products. Then, of course, the logistics of catching, processing and transportation come into play.

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are a very resilient and creative group and have found some great ways to do that. With investments – and that's part of what the fishery fund was to be about – and partnership with harvesters, the fishermen, fisher persons, with processors and fish plant workers to find better ways to create those new markets, those new opportunities and those new products is really what should be leading and driving in the fishing industry, but also in the aquaculture industry.

There's an aquaculture operation going on right now. I'm not sure if it's Mount Pearl or if it's St. John's. It's on the border. I think it's actually St. John's but very close to Mount Pearl. There's actually an aquaculture operation taking place at Lester's Farm where they're growing tilapia. A long-time project underway, it's many, many years of work and investments to get the products underway. They're one of the operations that were very significantly impacted by the storms a few weeks ago.

They have tilapia, but they also have an aquaponics operation associated with the tilapia. They actually have floats. I've been in there a number of times now; they actually have Styrofoam floats in a pool – it looks like a shallow swimming pool – in greenhouses where they start to grow produce through aquaponics.

The water is being circulated. It's being circulated through to tilapia, where the tilapia eat and produce waste. Water comes through the system to where the fresh produce is being grown. It acts as a fertilizer to grow the produce. As they drop these trays in, they move them

along and by the time you get down to the end, it's ready for harvest. At the same time they're starting new ones.

They have a constant supply of fresh produce that are produced through this aquaponics project. The growing of the fresh produce cleans the water, uses the fertilizer contained in the water, circulates the water back to the tilapia who create more fertilizer, which is circulated back. They sell the fish in tilapia and they sell the fresh produce. It's a really interesting operation. If anyone ever has a chance to go to Lester's on Pearltown Road, you should ask to see it. They're at point now where they are to have heavy regulations for ensuring that everything is sterile, so I'm not sure if they can continue to do them, but you certainly should ask about it if you ever go to Lester's Farm Chalet there on Pearltown Road where the operation is.

But it's happening right there and it's an opportunity where government partnered with a private operator who is in the agriculture business – Lester's is well known for the agriculture business, for generations. Now this particular family of Lester's have also branched into the aquaculture business, duplicating aquaculture business, being aquaponics, and doing a great job.

They're very hopeful and they're very optimistic of the potential success in that operation. And that's the kind of investment and creativity in government that people look for and strive for. That's where opportunities can be driven.

We haven't heard from the announcement this week on how these jobs are going to be created and building industry. Some believe that government should be the primary employer in many aspects of the province, but we believe it is government that should establish an environment whereby business can grow, flourish, do well, business can work, grow and as they work in a successful manner then they create jobs. Employment creates the paycheques which drives the economy.

That's what we believe. We believe that it's government's responsibility to provide the environment for those businesses to operate and to grow. That's an example of it.

So aquaculture, agriculture and tourism are three of the commitments that I know government wants to work on. I think they are great opportunities for the future of our province because natural resources, in many ways, is what keeps us together if it be in the ocean, or it be on land, or under land, there are significant natural resource opportunities for Newfoundland and Labrador.

Madam Speaker, as the clock is winding down I'm running out of time and I get the feeling Members opposite are quite eager to get up. Thursday afternoon we usually hear some entertainment from Members opposite and I'm sure that they're looking forward to that opportunity this being Thursday afternoon and the weekend coming as well.

I'm finishing up my time this afternoon, but I just want to finish up with this. I know Members opposite and Cabinet ministers have a lot of responsibilities. They have a lot on their plates. They have a lot of responsibilities. MHAs have responsibilities as well that keeps them busy in their own districts. I'm sure that they talk to people every – we talk to people every day who talk about the future and opportunities that exist.

I was told one time that we should always remember that politics in the province is about people and we should keep people top of mind at all times. That's what I encourage Members to do. I know one of the ministers got up today and said she doesn't need to be schooled by me. I'm not here to school anybody, Madam Speaker. That's not what I'm here to do. We're here as elected Members and depending on where you sit in the House, you have a role. We all have a role and we'll do that role.

When people call us and want us to ask about certain aspects of things that are happening in the province, we'll ask those questions. We'll ask those questions and we'll bring those matters forward and allow the government to speak to them and hopefully answer to them, and explain to people what the realities are of some of the aspects that people want to know about.

In governing, you should never forget about people. In order for people to believe in you, they have to trust you. I encourage all Members of the House to give people reason to trust them

and to believe in them and believe that there's a chance for the future.

It's a very sad day when someone else leaves the province. It was a sad day for me when I got that message earlier in the day about another young Newfoundland family who is leaving, who is moving away because the future is not bright.

Give people a reason to stay. Give people a reason to continue to be proud of Newfoundland and Labrador. Give people a reason to work hard to create and grow an economy that can benefit all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER (Dempster): The Speaker recognizes the hon. Member for Exploits.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DEAN: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, it's with humility and a sense of optimism that I rise in this hon. House today to represent the good people of Exploits and to speak on our Concurrence Motion and *Budget 2017*.

Previous to this, I would like to acknowledge last week's celebrating of Volunteer Week in our nation, in our province and in my district. I often reference our volunteers as hearts beating for us.

Madam Speaker, with yesterday Municipal Awareness Day, I wish to acknowledge and salute the more than 1,700 municipal councillors and hundreds of dedicated staff workers who make our municipalities more sustainable, prosperous and beautiful places to live.

With the upcoming municipal elections in September, now is the time to engage new people and begin cultivating the next generation of community leaders. The sector needs an infusion of new energy and ideas from the generation succeeding us. Every opportunity must be taken to reach out and inform youth in our communities who would potentially become

elected officials of council, municipal administrators or taxpayers.

Around the province Municipal Awareness Day festivities included municipal expos, school visits, open houses and fire truck rides. Many mayors and council members will also visit schools and hold simulated council meetings with students.

Madam Speaker, in *Budget 2016* we projected a deficit of \$1.83 billion. Over the course of the past 12 months, expenditures have been reduced and revenues have improved. This has led to a revised deficit of \$1.1 billion. In last year's budget, our government outlined a seven-year plan to return this province to surplus. We are currently ahead of our forecasting in terms of deficit projections and are on track to return to surplus in 2022-23.

Madam Speaker, since forming government, we have taken steps to improve the governance of Nalcor Energy. Under new leadership, performance of key projects have improved, specifically the Muskrat Falls Project. In *Budget 2017* the provincial government is making an equity investment of \$485.4 million in Nalcor Energy, which is a reduction of more than \$800 million from last year.

Our government, in collaboration with Nalcor, committed to controlling costs and ensuring all necessary steps are taken to identify and mitigate any remaining engineering and construction risks at Muskrat Falls.

Madam Speaker, our vision for the province does not include the doubling of electricity rates. It is not acceptable for residents to pay excessive electricity rates. We are happy to confirm to the people of this province that there are no new taxes or fee increases in *Budget 2017*.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DEAN: Our government is responsible to the needs of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. In 2017, residents will benefit from two reductions to the temporary gas tax. Beginning on June 1, we will reduce it by 8.5 cents per litre. On December 1, 2017, it will be reduced further by 4 cents per litre, for a total reduction of 12.5 cents.

We will review the remaining 4 cents as part of the 2017 fall fiscal and economic update. The projected annual deficit in *Budget 2017* is \$778 million, which is below our targeted deficit of \$800 million. For *Budget 2017* we reduced our borrowing by \$2 billion down to \$400 million. This marks a significant improvement in stabilizing the province's fiscal situation.

Madam Speaker, our government has prioritized the education of children and youth and the creation of a skilled workforce as being essential to the economic growth and sustainability of our province. We also appreciate that learning is lifelong, starting in the early years of a child's life. In this year's budget, we are making smart investments that will bring long-term benefits to all regions of this province.

As part of *The Way Forward*, we are committed to utilizing all available leverage funding. That is why our government has committed \$43.5 million towards infrastructure to leverage \$70.6 million in federal contributions.

AN HON. MEMBER: What?

MR. DEAN: It's \$70.6 million through the clean water and waste water fund.

Madam Speaker, we are also committing \$22 million to keep municipal operating grants at their current levels, and increasing the municipal portion of provincial gas tax revenue. The municipal share of gas tax revenue will increase by one-third, bringing the total commitment to \$7.1 million.

Budget 2017 involves the development of a responsive, integrated and sustainable approach to complex care management based in the community. We need to provide care in the home and in the community where possible and appropriate, and in a hospital only when necessary.

Through the Canada Health Board, our province will receive \$87.7 million over the next 10 years for home and palliative care, including \$2.9 million in 2017. We will invest \$2.5 million into a home first program designed to provide the necessary supports to individuals so they can stay in their homes as long as possible.

Accordingly, our government is proud of our commitment to a five-year, \$3 billion infrastructure plan. This will result in the equivalent of 4,900 full-time jobs on an annual basis. It will also allow businesses to better plan, and most importantly, Madam Speaker, it will allow for cost savings to be passed on to the government.

Through *Budget 2017*, approximately \$5 million is available for investment in the wild fishery and aquaculture industries. This funding will leverage significant investment from the private sector as well as the federal government.

Madam Speaker, in February, our government announced that we will be making more Crown land available for agricultural development. This is an example of how our government is creating an environment for entrepreneurs to excel while improving our province's ability to be more food self-sufficient. To assist these efforts, we are increasing the available land for agriculture, effectively doubling the land mass availability for this industry. By giving the land back to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, we are making a significant investment in our future.

Budget 2017 is committing \$3.25 million to the Provincial Agrifoods Assistance Program so that we can continue developing agricultural land, growing the industry and improving our food self-sufficiency. We are also committing \$1 million to continued research into crops such as canola that may now be able to be successfully grown in our province. Finally, we are committing \$500,000 to continue development of our provincial cranberry industry.

Madam Speaker, our path is certain with *The Way Forward* providing us with the guiding principles of developing a smarter approach to government and management. We are methodically and responsibly redesigning government to address our economic, social and fiscal challenges.

Our focus will be on positioning our province to be an ideal place to raise a family with a competitive work and business environment. In order to return to fiscal balance, we must think and act in that way over the long term. We can no longer afford to be bound by short-term reactionary thinking. The budget reflects our

commitment to a stronger economic foundation, a more efficient public sector, better services and better outcomes.

Madam Speaker, if I may, I would like now to reference excerpts from commentary made by a former premier during a previous trying time for our province, as both a backdrop to and a reflection of similar actions required and implemented by our current Premier during our province's most recent trying time in what can be likened to the worst free fall into the fiscal abyss ever to be shouldered by this province. The sad reality of this outcome is that the previous administration, unlike those that preceded them, had the luxury and good fortune of being the custodians of the biggest by far financial windfall to have shown up on our doorstep, yet failed to even remotely prepare us for what has always been and always will be inevitable, unfavourable weather conditions; hence, the rigours of *Budget 2016*.

AN HON. MEMBER: So they didn't learn their lesson.

MR. DEAN: No.

Anyway to the excerpts; this is from a former premier.

"Good evening.

"Earlier today, the Minister of Finance released the results of this review and the news is not good. The report, entitled: *Directions, Choices and Tough Choices*, indicates that we have an evolving fiscal crisis – a situation that if ignored or unresolved will threaten the future sustainability of the province and seriously compromise our social programs and way of life....

"The predictions for future budgets are even more disturbing. Unless we significantly adjust our course, we are facing total deficits of 1 billion dollars or greater for the next four years."

AN HON. MEMBER: Wow, what year was that, b'y?

MR. DEAN: I believe it was 2004. I stand to be corrected.

“This province should be no different than all of us in running our own households. But the province’s situation is comparable to any of us taking out a second mortgage just to buy groceries and running up our credit card to pay for electricity and telephone bills.

“If this continues, we are in very real danger of drowning in our own debt....

“We must address this situation now. We are digging ourselves deeper into a hole and that’s been our problem for far too long. We must start turning things around in Newfoundland and Labrador....

“Clearly, the Government, its employees and everyone in Newfoundland and Labrador will have to focus on dealing with this situation....

“The financial health of the Province is not government’s problem [alone but] it should be the concern of every one of its 519,000 residents....

“This will require hard work and sacrifice by everyone....

“You elected leaders to make responsible decisions but we must also protect those who are most vulnerable. Our government may have inherited this serious fiscal situation but we have absolutely no intention of letting our children and grandchildren inherit it from us....

“I do not want to underestimate the impact that some of these decisions will have over the coming years. We have structural problems with our budget that will require changes to the structure and function of government. We must focus government’s expenditures on priorities. Not everyone will get what they want from government. We must accept that government cannot be all things to all people....

“The ability to invest 100 per cent of our oil revenues in economic infrastructure would go a long way to helping us stand on our own feet in the long term.” That’s an interesting comment.

Madam Speaker, *Budget 2017* – back to the current time frame – *Budget 2017* sees us weathering the storm and in sight of more hospitable waters. Madam Speaker, our Premier,

our government, I would like to suggest, have no more of a monopoly on integrity and sincerity than those that have come to this hon. House before us but we have no less as well. Each and every one of us in this House are doing the best with the hand that we were dealt, in particular the sitting government.

Madam Speaker, *Budget 2017* reflects *The Way Forward* documented plan and the recent CDL financial report card in this recent report stated that Newfoundland and Labrador has improved markedly and particularly with the quality and –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. DEAN: – (inaudible) of its budget and public accounts documents. The report assesses whether individuals can get valid, timely and readily understood figures for total revenue and spending in the budget each government presents at the beginning of the year and in the public accounts at the end of the year.

Madam Speaker, here’s a footnote on the CDL Institute itself. CDL Institute publications undergo rigorous external review by academics and independent experts drawn from the public and private sectors. The institution peers review ensures the quality, integrity and objectivity of its policy research. The institute will not publish any study that in its view fails to meet these standards.

In its mission to educate and foster debate on essential public policy issues, the CDL Institute provides non-partisan policy advice to interested parties on a non-exclusive basis. The institute will not endorse any political party, elected official, candidate for elected office or interest group.

My time is pretty well run out there, Madam Speaker, and I’m going to draw this to a conclusion now. I noted Volunteer Week, I noted Municipalities Awareness Day. In closing, and before I sit down, with Sunday being Mother’s Day, I would like to wish all moms throughout our province a most happy day.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DEAN: And to my mom at the Hugh Twomey Centre in Botwood, know that your boy is coming home and looking forward to your warm embrace on Sunday.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: The Speaker recognizes the hon. Member for Virginia Waters – Pleasantville.

MR. B. DAVIS: Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to rise in this hon. House to represent the historic District of Virginia Waters – Pleasantville. Any time I get the opportunity to stand in this hon. House to do that I'm very pleased and honoured to do so.

I'd just like to take some time here to highlight some of the things in the budget that I think are great for the residents of the City of St. John's, but also for the residents of the province.

I'm going to start with one of the things that I think is one of the most groundbreaking things we did for this budget in the last 18 months we've been here, and that is asking Nalcor to invest \$210 million to help mitigate the electricity rates. It's going to make a substantial difference to the individuals in our province, it's going to make a substantial difference to the individuals in my district personally, but one of the big things is we're planning to fix a problem that the previous administration put their heads in the sand and let happen.

We're also going to continue that same investment through Nalcor for the next three years, starting with \$210 million, moving to \$245 million for the next two years after that in 2018 and 2019. Keeping electricity rates is one of our major priorities with this government, and I'm happy we invested heavily in trying to lower these electricity rates and make that a reality.

Our vision for our province does not include doubling of electricity rates. It's not acceptable for the residents to have to burden that, or have that fiscal burden on them. So we're doing everything we can to mitigate those risks.

Future electricity rate management is a priority for our government. We're going to continue to find ways to try to alleviate that burden on our taxpayers.

Nalcor, as I said before, have been directed to find \$210 million to place in the fund to mitigate these rates. We're committed to ensuring these rates stay as low as possible and be competitive, and undertake the work that's required to mitigate these actions long term.

Madam Speaker, I'm very happy we've invested over \$5 million in the Home Energy Savings Program, which the Minister of Service NL and Climate Change would appreciate for sure, as well as the Minister of Environment; and \$4 million over three years in the new Home Energy Loan Program which offers low-interest financing, up to \$10,000, for energy efficient home upgrades.

Some of the homes in my district were built well before building codes were as they stand right now, where insulation didn't have to be as high as it is now. Any opportunity we can do to increase insulation or make opportunities for residents to invest in new windows and the like to improve the efficiency of their homes, we're going to try to do that. Anything we can do to alleviate some of those costs to allow them the opportunity to spend that more disposable money is what we need to do.

It's not just important to make affordable housing in the City of St. John's, which is always a problem in my district, but making those houses affordable for people after they buy them. By making an investment into the home energy programs and the retrofitting of homes programs, we're doing just that. We're giving residents the opportunity to do home improvements that are going to save them money in the long run and make their houses much more affordable.

Little changes like placing more insulation, windows, doors, insulating a basement, are important things that we can invest in that's going to pay dividends to us and to the residents of our province. Energy efficiency and eco-friendly homes are the way of the future and something we should have been moved on well

before we moved into the debacle called Muskrat Falls.

A senior couple living in my district given an opportunity to invest in the retrofitting of their homes or getting insulation in their homes, any time we can invest a little bit of money to help them do those activities, it's going to free up more money for them to give to their grandkids or spend in the marketplace any time.

AN HON. MEMBER: What a Member.

MR. B. DAVIS: Thank you.

I'm glad you agree. Hopefully you'll be voting for the budget this time.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. B. DAVIS: I can always hope I guess.

AN HON. MEMBER: It seems like you're in Question Period (inaudible).

MR. B. DAVIS: Oh, thank you. We can talk later.

Thank you. I'm in the middle of something here.

Our government investment will pay dividends to the people of our province long term. It allows freeing up money, which is an important thing for them. These investments were made by this administration in reaction to trying to fix a problem that was created by the previous one with respect to the sanctioning of Muskrat Falls.

I agree with my colleague for Mount Pearl – Southlands who felt he was hoodwinked into the process, not given all the information. I think the word “hoodwinked” answers the question right across the board for the province. Not only was the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands hoodwinked, 520,000 Newfoundlanders and Labradorians felt hoodwinked when they were brought into this project without having all the information put in place.

All we're asking for was to provide the information to the people. The Opposition of the day happened to be the Liberals and the NDP. They asked those questions; the government of the day decided not to give the answers.

AN HON. MEMBER: Now they got the nerve to get up and ask about oversight.

MR. B. DAVIS: Right. Hear, hear!

I'm glad our government committed to helping those people with these initiatives because that's what we need to do to try to mitigate some of the problems that were created over the 12 years of PC rule.

One of the other things that I'm very happy about that our government embarked on was reducing the temporary gas tax; 75 per cent reduction in the gas tax for the residents is going to help them an awful lot. We've heard the negative comments regarding the gas tax, but it's something we had to do as a government to try to get our fiscal house in order.

Beginning on June 1, we will reduce the gas tax by 8.5 cents per litre and on December 1, 2017 we'll reduce it by a further 4 cents per litre, for a total reduction of 12.5 cents. We will review the remaining 4-cent tax as part of the 2017 fall fiscal and economic update.

As committed in last year's budget, tax increases must be balanced with tax competitiveness. We will initiate a comprehensive, independent review of our tax system, as the Finance Minister has mentioned on numerous occasions, which will be completed within our current mandate, which is important. It hasn't been done in a number of years, a number of decades actually, and it's important that we do that to make sure we find the competitive nature that we have in this province.

Our province leads the country in terms of revenue generation on a per capita basis. We have done that for a while. We have reduced the deficit from \$1.83 billion to \$1.1 billion, and we're committed to returning to surplus and on track to do so, I might add, by 2022-2023, undoing the years of overspending and awful fiscal management by the PCs. We can't reverse what they took 12 years to do in only 18 months.

As a result of the expense reductions primarily in 2017-18, the deficit projection of \$778 million is lower than what we even projected for ourselves, our target of \$800 million. That's why we focused on trying to do things right. We have

a plan. For any Member on the opposite side to say there is no plan, just read the book.

This includes an additional \$283 million reduction in spending this year. We are on pace to meet the deficit reduction targets this year as well. Madam Speaker, there are no new taxes or no new fee increases in *Budget 2017*. In *Budget 2017* the borrowing requirement – this is important to note – has been reduced from \$2 billion to \$400 million, which is a huge reduction.

We are currently ahead of our own target forecasting in terms of deficit projection and on track to return to surplus, as I mentioned, in 2022 and 2023. All of this points to sound fiscal management, exactly what a province needs to return to prosperity.

I am pleased that we will be maintaining the Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement and Seniors' Benefit with an investment of \$120 million. These programs benefit approximately 155,000 residents and families annually, and will help to protect those most vulnerable in our current economic climate.

These are initiatives that I hear about every day in my district. Is it enough? Absolutely not, we have to do more. We're trying to do more, but given the fiscal situation that we were left in, that's what we can accomplish right now.

In St. John's alone, our government has put \$21.3 million in investment into health care facilities, including \$7.5 million towards the replacement of the Waterford Hospital. We have also invested \$1.2 million from Justice and Public Safety. One of the things that I really like from Justice and Public Safety is a \$250,000 investment for the Sexual Assault Response Pilot Program to provide legal support to sexual assault victims.

We also have \$1.6 million in upgrades to the Arts and Culture Centre here in the city, an institution. Many people in the City of St. John's and all across our province come to the Arts and Culture Centre here. Any investment we can make to upgrade that area is very, very important.

Some of the community investments that are made in this *Budget 2017* are \$142 million on our municipal infrastructure programs. I'm a former municipal councillor and I understand an investment in the municipality pays off dividends in helping alleviate some of the tax base. We have to remember there's only one taxpayer in this province. They pay federal, municipal and provincial taxes. It's only one taxpayer, so any alleviation we can give would be great.

There's \$16.6 million in improving social and affordable housing. We all understand the importance of affordable housing. It's a major issue. Many of my colleagues that sat on the All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions would know travelling across the province that's one of the major issues that you face each and every day when you're dealing with a mental illness or addictions issue. Finding affordable housing, finding adequate housing is a challenge in the St. John's region, but it's a challenge across our province in some other regions. So any investment we can make would be a great step in the right direction – and \$1.2 million in Justice facilities, as I mentioned earlier.

Seventy million dollars for the municipal waste water project funding under Clean Water and Wastewater Fund. That's important because everyone deserves to have clean drinking water, whether you're on Bell Island or whether you're in Conception Bay South or whether you're in St. John's. Newfoundland and Labrador has the ability to have the cleanest water in our country so, therefore, any investments we can make in the municipalities to do that is paramount. I thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs for doing that and bringing that forward and understanding the concerns that municipalities have. Any funding that we can give to that would be cooperative funding with the municipality and it's going to get a lot more work done and that's a great investment in the people of our province.

An additional \$38.1 million for municipal fundings under municipal capital works and multi-year funding programs – it's important for municipalities to understand where the money is coming from and having long-term planning is an important piece – \$15 million in municipal

projects funded under the national project component for the Building fund; \$10.2 million in maintenance and repairs for the upkeep of public housing properties; \$500,000 for planned construction of a new court complex in St. John's. All of these are massive investments in the people of our province.

I'd like to take some time to talk about the All-party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions. I'm very excited that our government committed to \$5 million initial funding to try to start the process towards recovery, a vision for a renewed mental health and addiction system in Newfoundland and Labrador. I know my colleagues from both sides of the House that sat on that committee understand the importance of doing these recommendations and implementing these recommendations as quickly as we possibly can.

The implementation plan will be released in June and we're quite happy that we're on schedule for that. It's going to, hopefully, fundamentally change the way we look at mental health services and addiction services in our province. I know my colleagues on both sides of the House can attest to how challenging it was to hear the heart-wrenching stories of those individuals that told those first-person stories about what they're facing with addictions or what they're facing with mental health and addictions right across the province and in their families and the impact that is having on their families. I'm very happy that we're making that investment with that.

We also have a great investment here in St. John's, provincial money, for the establishment of the new Waterford Hospital. We understand that when we release the report for implementation for the all-party committee, it's going to be important because it's going to lay out plans on how we're going to move forward on these initiatives and what community outreach processes will be there. Because the Waterford, as it stands today, shouldn't be the way we build the Waterford. There's community outreach that we need to do. It doesn't necessarily need to be a 140-bed or a 500-bed complex. It's very important we get the services out to the community where they can be dealt with better than we can do here in government.

I'd like to touch on a little bit of investment within health care. In *Budget 2017*, we provided \$88.2 million for health care infrastructure to support efficiency, delivery, quality care and access to treatment in this budget; \$43 million for repairs and renovations in health care facilities and replacements and upgrades to medical equipment province-wide; \$13.2 million to advance the replacement of Western Memorial Regional Hospital. As I mentioned, the Waterford investment; \$4.6 million to increase long-term care capacity in Corner Brook; \$4.6 million as well to develop a endoscopy suite in Central Newfoundland Health Centre in Grand Falls as well.

So it's important that we invest all across our province. One of the things with long-term care, we've addressed some of the problems – well, we're beginning to address some of the problems in Western Newfoundland. In Central Newfoundland we have problems with long-term care. So we're very much interested in trying to announce that. An announcement on long-term care in Central Newfoundland is going to be eminently happening. It's an important investment that we need to make, and I'm very happy we're part of that investment.

One of the other community investments we made was the \$3.6 million investment in modernizing and renovating public rental housing. As I mentioned before, mental health and physical health is tied directly to housing and the ability to receive affordable housing and good quality housing. So one of the things I'm very happy that we did, we put investments in that area. I could go on and on about that.

The last thing I want to touch on is an investment in agriculture. You're probably going to ask: Why would a Member from Virginia Waters – Pleasantville talk about investments in agriculture?

AN HON. MEMBER: Tell us.

MR. B. DAVIS: I'll tell you. Thank you very much.

I'll tell you. I'm glad someone played along with that one.

MR. LETTO: Because you're a team player, that's why.

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

MR. B. DAVIS: Excellent.

I'm not going to talk about just the investments across the Island, which is very important, but one of the first files I received when I was lucky enough to be elected in November of 2015 was a file from a farmer who wants to set up an agricultural hydroponics system within my own district, which will eventually employ 50 people, which is a great agricultural district.

The agricultural hub of our province is Virginia Water – Pleasantville. No, in all fairness, it's a small investment that they're willing to make themselves and it's going to –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. B. DAVIS: That's right, yeah.

It's an important investment that I think will pay off dividends in these areas. In Virginia Waters – Pleasantville, if we can make advances in agriculture and maybe employ 50 people over a five- or six-year period, that's a great step forward. The \$3.9 million to continue Growing Forward 2, a five-year, \$37 million cost-sharing project with the federal government, is an important investment for our province.

I could go on and on. My time is getting short.

I'd just like to say thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: The hon. the Government House Leader.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Given the hour of the day, I would move, seconded by the Member for Harbour Grace – Port de Grave, that the House do now adjourn.

MADAM SPEAKER: This House now stands adjourned until 1:30 on Monday.