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Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER (Trimper): Admit strangers, please.

Order, please!

I'd like to welcome the Members back. It's good to see you after you've taken your Oath and it's good that you've come back. We went through a lot of trouble yesterday. Again, I'd like to thank all of the staff of the House of Assembly. I think you will agree it was a very fitting ceremony for such an auspicious occasion. So, welcome to you all again.

We have a few things I'd like to do today. First of all, I'd like to welcome some new Pages. To my right is Emma Taylor from St. John's, and Emma is completing a Bachelor of Science with a major in Applied Mathematics at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Also, I have to my left, new to us, is Elizabeth Tuck from Mount Pearl. Elizabeth is studying at St. Thomas University in New Brunswick and she's completing a Bachelor of Arts with Honours in Human Rights and majors in Political Science and Comparative Literature. Also, joining us are Katelyn Galway and Alden Spencer, our returning Pages.

Welcome to our Pages.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Over in the Speaker's gallery, to my right, I would like to welcome Ms. Lorraine Michael – certainly no stranger, former Member of the House of Assembly and past leader of the Newfoundland and Labrador New Democratic Party. Ms. Michael will be recognized in a Member's statement this afternoon, and she's accompanied by Laurel Doucette.

Welcome to you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: I could almost ask you how the view is from that chair.

MR. SPEAKER: For Members' statements today we will hear from the hon. Members for the Districts of Lewisporte - Twillingate, Fogo Island - Cape Freels, Conception Bay East - Bell Island, Harbour Main and St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

Before I introduce the Members' statements, I would like to recognize Ms. Deirdre Lono is joining us today for a very special Member's statement.

So let's start with the hon. Member for Lewisporte - Twillingate, Sir.

MR. BENNETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's great to be back.

On June 8, I had the distinct honour to attend the Annual Review Ceremony of 83 Briton Sea Cadet Corps. All cadets did an exceptional job with their marching, band performances and various displays of the skills they have learned throughout their training.

Cadets are encouraged to become active, responsible members of the community while they learn valuable life and work skills such as teamwork, leadership and citizenship.

A number of awards were presented during the ceremony, with Ethan Hodder receiving the Lord Strathcona Trust Fund Medal, which is the highest award that can be bestowed upon a cadet in recognition of exemplary performance in physical and military training.

Jasmine Blake received the Legion Medal of Excellence. Samuel Anstey was presented with the Most Proficient Cadet, while Jacob Bennett took Top On-Parade Cadet.

Instructors Lieutenant Navy Monique Wellman and Tara King were presented with the National Cadet and the Junior Canadian Rangers Support Group Commander's award.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members to join me in congratulating the cadets and instructors of 83 Briton Cadet Corps and wish them much success in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels.

MR. BRAGG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Once again, I feel honoured and privileged to rise in this House and tell of incredible accomplishments by residents of my District of Fogo Island - Cape Freels.

We all know how important participation, team work and physical fitness shapes a young mind. There is no better example of that than Noah Carter.

Noah will be graduating grade 12 from Pearson Academy in New-Wes-Valley in the coming weeks. Not only will he be graduating at the top of his class, he will be graduating with a room full of athletic awards. Noah excelled in all school sports. At hockey, softball, basketball, track and field, volleyball, badminton, table tennis and ultimate Frisbee competitions, you would find Noah at the top of the heap. His parents, Jeffery and Lorna, as you would expect, are very proud of him.

Recently, at a school sports NL banquet, Noah was awarded the Brother G.I. Moore, Student Athlete of the Year, in the 3A male category. Pearson Academy will forever remember Noah for his big smile and ease in which he lit up the team with his leadership and gracefulness.

Noah, you are indeed a gentleman, keep up the good work. We wish you well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This past Thursday I had the privilege of attending this year's graduation of the community adult basic education program on Bell Island. Six diplomas and six certificates were awarded to those who had completed their high school equivalency or to those moving on to another level in the program.

For over a decade, this program has been offering educational supports for more than 100 students and have seen many of those go on to post-secondary institutions to further their career path. The program had started by offering a level I educational program, then with its uptake and support quickly moved to also offering a level II program. It wasn't too long before the Bell Island program was licensed by government to offer the first level III program outside a college system, something the instructors, students, organizers and community should be very proud of.

The program has attracted participants from all backgrounds, ages and even from other communities as it offers a very professional, inclusive and supportive environment. I have to acknowledge that a lot of the credit for the success of the program has to be given to the two instructors, Paul and Aimee, who go beyond the call of duty to ensure students success.

I congratulate and thank the students for their commitment to the program and ask all Members of this House to wish them every success as they move forward on the next journey of their career path.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member, I welcome, for Harbour Main.

MS. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today and share with all hon. Members and the people of Newfoundland and Labrador a true act of bravery which occurred in my District of Harbour Main on May 14, 2019.

Mr. Paul Furey of Chapel's Cove ran to the rescue of a gentleman of the same community, Mr. Bernard Hawco, who had caught fire while working on his property burning brush in the early afternoon.

As Bernard was engulfed in flames, Paul at first tried patting his neighbour down with gloves, then a jacket and then a seat cushion from Bernard's truck. Bernard's boots kept reigniting, so Paul quickly got the senior out of his burning clothing – safe and protected from immediate danger. Paul then extinguished the brush fire which had been spreading quickly in the area.

Bernard is recovering in hospital today but is alive due to the fast thinking and heroic efforts of his valiant neighbour and friend.

I ask all Members of this House to join me in paying tribute to Mr. Paul Furey, who demonstrated great courage and sacrifice in saving the life of another human being.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. COFFIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I am honoured and proud to stand today to recognize and celebrate Ms. Lorraine Michael, former MHA for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi and past New Democratic Party Leader.

Ms. Michael's contributions to this House of Assembly and our province are innumerable. Ms. Michael is personally responsible for my being in the House of Assembly.

Lorraine taught for 12 years here in our province before committing her life to social justice and community activism, provincially, nationally and internationally. Before being elected, she was the Executive Director of Women in Resource Development.

Ms. Michael was first elected as MHA for Signal Hill - Quidi Vidi in a 2006 by-election, was re-elected in 2007 and 2011, and again in 2015 as the MHA for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi. Lorraine also served as Leader of the

Newfoundland and Labrador NDP from 2006 to 2015.

Thank you, Lorraine, for your tireless efforts as a parliamentarian, and your lifelong commitment to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. You are a mentor and a guide, and I'm eternally grateful for your support.

I ask all hon. Members to join with me in thanking and congratulating Ms. Michael.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo - La Poile, who, I understand, has leave for this statement.

Please proceed.

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

And I thank my colleagues for providing leave.

I invite all hon. Members to join me today in paying tribute to Simon Lono, a Newfoundlander dedicated to making our province a better place for us all.

Simon passed away on May 24, 2019. He spent most of his life working in some aspect of politics or public service, in either government or Opposition.

Simon had a deep and abiding love of Parliament and its traditions, generally, and of this House, in particular. He believed that it's only through informed, respectful and vigorous debate that those of us fortunate enough to sit in this House can ensure that whatever decision we reach will be the very best for all the people of the province. Simon also believed that all citizens should take part in their communities to make the future better for us all.

He put these two beliefs into action through his involvement in debating. As a national debate champion in his youth, he toured the Soviet Union in the late 1980s with a Canadian and American debate team to build bridges between West and East at the height of the Cold War.

At home, Simon coached debate teams and supported the Newfoundland and Labrador

Youth Parliament. He founded the Newfoundland and Labrador Speech and Debate Union in 2000, set up programs to train debaters, judges and coaches; and raised money so that students could develop their debating skills regardless of personal finances.

Engagement; activism; informed, respectful, passionate debate; working with others to make life better for all – surely that is politics at its best.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that you convey to Simon's family – his wife Deirdre, his children Simon, Diana, Sarah and Sam and his brothers Norman and Mark – the deepest and most sincere condolences of this House and the staff of the House.

I ask you to do this, Mr. Speaker, in the hope that such an expression of sympathy and respect for our departed friend and colleague would give them some small comfort in their bereavement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Human Resource Secretariat.

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm pleased to rise in this hon. House today to recognize Public Service Week, which runs June 9 to June 15.

The theme, Proudly Serving Newfoundland and Labrador, speaks to the pride and commitment I witness every day from our valued public service employees as they work to move our province forward, making it a better place to live and work.

Mr. Speaker, I know that every Member here would agree with me when I say that Newfoundland and Labrador has some of the

hardest working public service employees in our country. Each day, our colleagues develop policy and deliver programs and services that positively impact families, individuals and businesses throughout our province.

As a part of this special week, nominations have been opened for the Public Service Awards of Excellence, which will be awarded this fall in recognition of exceptional work. To be recognized by fellow employees is a great accomplishment and I encourage staff to nominate a colleague that exemplifies a quality and value of work that is truly outstanding.

Mr. Speaker, the significant progress that we've made as a government would not have been achievable without the tremendous support of our public service employees.

I ask all Members to join me in recognizing Public Service Week and the many valuable contributions of provincial government employees.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

MR. WAKEHAM: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. On behalf of the Official Opposition, I would like to wish all members of the public service a very happy Public Service Week, and I would like to thank them for their commitment to this province.

The individuals who make up our public service are undoubtedly hard working. Each and every day they strive to make our province a better place to live, work and visit. Being employed in the public service isn't always easy, as employees are faced sometimes with challenging files and have to make hard decisions. However, our public service does this with skill and dedication. We must always remember the role of a public servant is to advise fearlessly and implement flawlessly.

As Members of this House, we can learn a lot from the public service. The members of the public service are subject matter experts who can help us to make better decisions for the province as a whole. They can help us to provide better quality and more efficient services.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

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

MS. COFFIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement and congratulate the public service on their excellent work.

Our public service is indeed a dedicated, hard-working group of professionals. They provide the services that are essential to our lives. Usually they work in the background, so it is very important to celebrate their contributions this week and hold the Awards of Excellence every fall. I am sure that public service employees will have no trouble finding those among them who are deserving of an award for exceptional work.

Thank you to all of those who work in the public service, and thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources.

MR. BYRNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

World Oceans Day is recognized globally on June 8, but we've enjoyed a full week of events in this province. I am really encouraged by the initiatives Newfoundlanders and Labradorians took last week to celebrate World Oceans Day

and to explore this year's theme, "together we can protect and restore our ocean."

The focus of this year's World Oceans Day celebration was reducing plastic pollution, and highlighting solutions that inspire leadership and conservation, both locally and globally.

Mr. Speaker, last week I attended a World Oceans Day event at Immaculate Heart of Mary School in Corner Brook, where a student assembly was held and students shared their ideas about protecting our oceans through video projects and art work. A family fun day was held at the Marine Institute in St. John's and that was also a great success, with families coming together to enjoy a wealth of activities aimed at raising awareness of the importance of our oceans.

Mr. Speaker, all over this province, schools and organizations hosted beach clean ups, information sessions and student art challenges – including a poster contest that generated more than 1,500 entries from kindergarten to grade six students from all over the province. It was fantastic to see so many young people involved in celebrating the ocean, a most precious resource shared by us all.

Mr. Speaker, our province was founded on the ocean as its primary resource, and the ocean remains an integral economic and cultural force to this day. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians' active engagement in this year's World Oceans Day events demonstrates their devotion to this resource, and our shared commitment to preserving the ocean's species and ecosystems for generations to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I want to thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. Mr. Speaker, we're all

connected by the oceans, but especially in this province where the ocean is so important to our very being. Our oceans are a tremendous resource and it's nice to see so many students and organizations participate in World Oceans Day activities this year.

I'd like to acknowledge and thank all those who took part in clean ups and other events across the province. I encourage everyone to do what they can to take care of our oceans so that they can be protected and preserved for our future.

Every little bit counts. Together we can make a difference. In that spirit, I encourage government to move forward on the implementation of the single use plastic bag in this province as soon as possible.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. J. DINN: Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. And, as a teacher, I am pleased to hear that the minister took part in World Oceans Day events and heard from students and families.

I'm also pleased, Mr. Speaker, to hear that the minister believes in protecting and restoring our oceans. We look forward to working with government to strengthen environmental legislation and rules around seismic exploration and open sea pen aquaculture to protect our oceans for our future generations.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: 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 Official Opposition.

MR. CROSBIE: Mr. Speaker, thank you.

While recognizing the paramount need to return to surplus by 2022-23: Does the Premier accept that the electorate has just instructed their representatives to collaborate on reorganizing budget priorities? And, if not, what instruction from the electorate does he think he has?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think on May 16, when I look back at election day and the 28-day campaign that was ran, I think I made my intentions very clear on election night when I spoke to the people of our province and put forward a willingness to work together on behalf of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. As a matter of fact, made it quite clear that I wanted to work with all 40 Members of this House of Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at the dynamic of the decisions that we have to make, all of us I believe that sit in this House, that really what we want to do is make decisions that are in the best interest of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

In 2016, we started with a plan to return to balance in 2022-2023. Mr. Speaker, we are creating jobs in our province, and our province is on track to return to surplus. I believe that is the budget that we put forward to the people of our province during this recent election.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: I thank the Premier for the answer.

And he and I, as he knows, have had an exchange of correspondence on potential modifications to the unpassed budget.

Is the Premier willing to collaborate to pass supply and, over coming months, to negotiate policy preferences expressed by the voting public, like insulin pump coverage and of killing

the levy, while respecting the paramount need to return to balance?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker.

In the letter that was sent to me on June 5, I think it's now publicly shared – at least I hope it is – from the Leader of the Opposition, there were eight initiatives or eight things that were discussed. All of these initiatives were not new, Mr. Speaker, to government. These are all things that we're currently working on.

As everyone in this province would know already, the levy was a temporary levy and it's legislated out. So this is not on the advice or the response or a reaction to any particular letter that was sent to me on June 5. This was all part of the plan when the temporary levy was in *Budget 2016*. There is a legislative process that will make sure that this levy is gone by 2019. That's about \$55 million that will go in the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, as well as insulin pump coverage that was expanded this year, ArtsNL funding, Mr. Speaker, all of which are part of Budget 2019.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: I thank the Premier for that somewhat limited amount of encouragement, and would ask the following: Upon election of the Speaker, the Premier has a 19-Member caucus in a 40-Member Legislature. Can the Premier explain how this amounts to a mandate to pass his pre-election budget with no changes?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, the mandate that I'm talking about is that we have 20 Liberal seats currently in Newfoundland and Labrador. When you look at the popular vote within our province, I'm still Leader of the Liberal Party, which puts me in a position to be Premier of the province. That is the mandate that was given to me and a mandate to lead this province in this

minority government. And it's one that I embrace, because I see this as an opportunity to work together with every Member.

These ideas that have been mentioned, as I said, are not new; there are about eight initiatives there. What I've done in response to the letter is to ask the Leader of the Opposition, which is the responsible manner, to actually cost these initiatives and also speak to, in a very specific way, the cuts or the expenditure reductions that he refers to in his first letter on June 5. I think that is what leadership does, to actually work together in the response of that letter.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: The government promised to eliminate the sales tax imposed on auto insurance premiums, but chose not to give this measure legal effect before the election. People found out about this while renewing their coverage.

Will this legislation be brought to the House?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Yes.

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

MR. CROSBIE: Can the Premier or other minister explain when?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

For Members opposite, given this is their first exposure to Question Period, if you look at your desk there, there would be an Order Paper there that would explain when this piece of legislation was coming. I understand this was introduced yesterday by the Minister of Finance. This is a piece of legislation that we want to bring forward too. Of course, the House Leader, as everyone would know right now, will introduce this bill.

We want to get this done, Mr. Speaker. People in our province are looking forward to this rebate. This is a commitment that we have made, nearly \$60 million to the people of our province, to remove auto insurance.

If you remember, Mr. Speaker, this was all part and parcel of the Public Utilities Board review on auto insurance that we were the first administration of many – many administrations prior to us have pushed this down the road. This administration dealt with it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Could someone from the ministry explain whether discussions have taken place with representatives of the insurance industry on the question of inconvenience and expense arising from the need to make rebates of auto insurance premiums.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, any time you make a decision within government that's imposed, there's always a date that would be imposed. So what we want to do is work with the insurance industry to make sure that these rebates can be effective, because the objective here is to put this money back in the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, without delay.

We want to get this done. People have been asking for this. This was one of the things that came forward from the Public Utilities review, but it's something that we've wanted to do for quite some time. The measures that we imposed in 2016, the decisions that were made, Mr. Speaker, were very obvious, based on the fiscal challenges that we were left with coming into government in 2015.

So, Mr. Speaker, we are glad to get this money back in the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians as quickly as possible.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

MR. WAKEHAM: Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Finance: The December 2018 report of the government's Independent Tax Review Committee said the Temporary Deficit Reduction Levy was – quote – regressive, a head tax, poor tax policy and consideration should be given to ending the Temporary Deficit Reduction Levy prior to the legislated date. Why not take your own committee's sound advice and immediately eliminate the levy?

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The levy is being eliminated in 2019. What we chose to do, as a government, is to reach the greatest number of people in the province with a tax break that we could by eliminating the sales tax on automobile insurance.

The Independent Tax Review Committee did not recommend the elimination of automobile tax insurance right away. They did recommend the levy, but the automobile tax insurance reaches a greater number of people and this way both win because the levy is gone this year and the automobile tax insurance is gone this year as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

MR. WAKEHAM: Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister for clarification.

Is the minister telling the taxpayers of this province that they will have to pay the full cost of the levy on their 2019 tax returns?

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the tax levy is gone as of December 31, 2019. That's been legislated in this House since 2016. The same people that pay

the levy, Mr. Speaker, of all tax filers in the province, less than 30 per cent actually pay the levy, but of people filing taxes in the province, almost 100 per cent pay automobile insurance.

We wanted to give the widest number of people we could a tax break, and that's what we did with the automobile insurance. The levy is gone this year as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

MR. WAKEHAM: Mr. Speaker, the answer is obviously, yes, and the minister referred to an amount of \$55 million being the impact of the tax levy, so it isn't insignificant to the people of this province.

Mr. Speaker, there's new information that insolvencies are up over 50 per cent in this province. Businesses are going under because they're prospective customers have less to spend, thanks to exorbitant taxes.

Is the minister concerned about this number of insolvencies?

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

MR. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, there are jurisdictions in Canada with higher rates of growth and insolvency than this province, but what I will say is that in *Budget 2015*, the previous government gave a projection on the amount of capital investment in this province; we've exceeded that. They gave a projection on the number of jobs in this province; right now, today, we've exceeded that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: I remind all Members I will not tolerate interruptions, please.

MR. OSBORNE: They gave a projection on the amount of retail sales in this province; we've exceeded that.

So, based on their numbers, I would suspect that things would've been worse. We've got 11 consecutive months of year-over-year job growth in this province, we've worked hard to overcome the fiscal crisis that was there in 2015-2016 and we're making progress.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

MR. WAKEHAM: Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: What is your solution to bring down the number of insolvencies in this province?

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

MR. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, what we're doing is probably the opposite of what the crowd opposite were doing when they projected that capital investment would be lower than we've actually delivered, where retail sales in the province would be lower than what we delivered, where the number of jobs in the province would be lower than what we delivered.

We've come off a period where we've had two megaprojects shut down, and something that this province could not control was the effects of Fort McMurray on the province, where people had large incomes in Fort McMurray. Literally thousands of people in this province were affected by that, but we have made huge progress with 11 consecutive months of year-over-year job growth.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

MR. WAKEHAM: Mr. Speaker, the Dominion Bond Rating Service has indicated that the deficit for this year is actually \$855 million.

In this government's pre-election budget, the minister stated that the province would record a

\$1.9-billion surplus. I ask the minister: Which number is correct?

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

MR. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, with the Atlantic Accord, based on the accounting principles that this province has had in place for two decades, it does show a surplus, but without the Atlantic Accord, we'd have a \$577-million deficit in this province.

If the Member wanted to be completely accurate with the people of the province and read a little bit further into DBRS, the reason they show the figure they do is because they project all capital costs immediately, as opposed to amortized over the life of the project.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

MS. EVANS: Mr. Speaker, the people of my District of Torngat Mountains rely heavily on marine service for food security and to keep the cost of living down. I repeat, rely heavily on the marine service to keep food security and to keep the cost of living down.

Now that the Lewisporte run has been eliminated, all food and materials have to be trucked to their freight facility in Goose Bay in order to be shipped to Northern Labrador. It is now June 11, Mr. Speaker, and it has not been made public when this facility will start accepting freight.

I ask the Premier: When will this facility start accepting freight, including food and essential goods, to ship to the Northern Labrador communities?

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

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

And I thank the hon. Member for the question.

Mr. Speaker, when we made the changes to Lewisporte into Goose Bay as the main hub, we also took our road database and we adjusted the freight rates to actually reflect that change, Mr. Speaker. So what the people of the North Coast will see is adjustments in the freight rates to actually come down to reflect the difference in the distance.

Mr. Speaker, as for the information on when the terminal will be starting to accept freight, I will get that and speak to the Member later with that date.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I find that answer unacceptable for the communities in my District of Torngat Mountains. It is critical for them to have the date that a freight shed will start accepting freight. Right now, because of the Lewisporte services being cancelled by this Liberal government, I say, Mr. Speaker, that they cannot plan to truck their freight into Goose Bay to be shipped to the North Coast. So it is very, very confusing and very, very stressing for businesses and individuals.

I ask again, Mr. Speaker, we need the date that freight services will be open in Goose Bay. It is critical to my communities.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Again, I say to the hon. Member, I will provide you with that date. It's not something I have at hand. Mr. Speaker, what we have been able to do to reflect on the changes to that service – and, Mr. Speaker, this is the first time that the North Coast of Labrador is going to have a roll-on, roll-off ferry, something that's very important to

the people of the North Coast, and we were able to do that after many years of a government that wasn't willing to actually make these changes for the people of the North Coast.

So, Mr. Speaker, we will see a reflection in the new freight rates of how this service is going to look. Mr. Speaker, right now, if we were to bring in that service today we would not even be able to get up the North Coast. Right now, the ice conditions are such that the ferry would not be able to operate.

So, Mr. Speaker, we'll make sure that the necessary provisions are made so that the people of the North Coast can get their necessary freight.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. EVANS: Mr. Speaker, I find that answer unacceptable as well. We need the date.

I also would like to say that the freight has to be shipped, has to be trucked up the Northern Peninsula, across the Strait of Belle Isle, up the South Coast highway into Goose Bay, then put on the freight boat. Mr. Speaker, this takes time. The suppliers need an advance notice. We need to know when that freight shed is going to be open to accept freight.

I will also say, Mr. Speaker, as a representative of Torngat Mountains, the cost incurred for extra trucking is causing a lot of increase. So I disagree with your statement that it's actually going to reduce cost.

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

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, as we found out this past winter, there are actually about six tractor-trailer loads of freight per week that go in to Goose Bay. So, Mr. Speaker, there's already ample freight going in to Goose Bay that goes up the Northern Peninsula, goes across the Strait

of Belle Isle and up the Trans-Labrador Highway. So freight going in to Goose Bay is nothing new.

The reality is, I will get the date for the Member of when we will be opening the shed. The reality is at this point in time, Mr. Speaker, ice conditions wouldn't allow us to go north anyway.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. EVANS: Mr. Speaker, the reason why getting the date that the freight is going to be accepted is because there's a small, little freight shed – and my constitutions will agree with me – there's a small, little freight shed in Goose Bay; so, therefore, they will not accept freight until the shipping season is open. So the thing about it is we cannot actually ship. We cannot actually truck to Goose Bay right now and it's causing a lot of hardship.

We need to know when the suppliers can start trucking their freight up to Goose Bay.

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

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

I thank the employees at TW for their great work, Mr. Speaker, because I have just been informed that based on ice and weather conditions, we'll make the decision when the freight shed is going to open. The ADM responsible for marine will be in Goose Bay next week to actually have meetings to make sure that this is in place when we need to be there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. EVANS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My constituents have been looking for that information and it has been causing a lot of stress. So if you could get that information out to the public, we'd greatly appreciate it, Mr. Speaker.

I do have one more question, which is critical for my constituents. The start date of the northern ferry service to Labrador communities have not also been made public; when the ferry service is going to start its run. I realize that right now with the ice conditions it can't run, but we need to know because residents are growing more and more concerned because the ferry, the *MV Kamutik W*, is still under repair in Norway. She's still in dry dock in Norway.

I ask the minister: When will the ferry service to Northern Labrador communities start, and will the *MV Kamutik W* be ready in time to meet the scheduled dates?

MR. SPEAKER: The Member's time has expired.

The Minister of Transportation and Works, please.

MR. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the hon. Member for the question.

Mr. Speaker, as I said in my first response to the hon. Member, we will get that date for her. Our officials are available any time if she would like to sit down and have a discussion around that service. Our department has been always very open in that way.

Mr. Speaker, the reality is right now ice conditions will dictate when we get the service started, but I can assure the Member opposite and the people of the North Coast of Labrador that we'll make whatever provisions are necessary to make sure freight is getting to the North Coast.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

MR. PARDY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We are aware of the scarce financial resources. Following a report of the Auditor General in September that outlined widespread fraud and abuse, including \$735 to rent a wheelbarrow for two weeks, the English School District submitted a proposed action plan and budget request to the department on October 29, 2018.

Can the minister update this House as to why there has not been any action taken in *Budget 2019* to deal with these serious issues?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. WARR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, I want to thank the hon. Member for his question, and it's an opportunity for me to stand as Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development in my first response.

The school board, Mr. Speaker, continues to implement actions and provide a full-scale update to the report to the Public Accounts Committee. We continue to explore cost-effective ways to improve the district's financial processes, such as integrating them in the government core financial management system under a shared services model. We will continue to look into the situation there and certainly I'd be more than happy to bring that report back to the House at my earliest possible opportunity.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

MR. PARDY: I thank the minister.

Mr. Speaker, just to add, and if I may add, if the government in the report back can assure the

people of Newfoundland and Labrador that sound controls are now in place to prevent a repeat of such an incident?

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

MR. WARR: Certainly, Mr. Speaker, as always, everybody's job here is to make improvements. We have engaged a consultant to work with the district and government officials to do a detailed analysis of moving forward with the district's financial management system.

Again, Mr. Speaker, any further information, I'd be glad to share it with the House.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

MR. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, our office continues to hear from parents regarding the concerns over the 1.6-kilometre rule for busing. In particular, parents in the MacLaren-Faulkner Street area of St. John's have been told they will lose their bus stop in September because they are 1.56 kilometres from school.

Worse still, Mr. Speaker, the school board has told the parents they cannot get a courtesy stop because nearby Thorburn Road is too busy and a dangerous four-lane road to stop safely.

Will the minister finally put student safety first and review this situation?

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

MR. WARR: Again, Mr. Speaker, I'd certainly thank the hon. Member for the question. While we continue to hear concerns from parents and from our colleagues across the way with regard to the 1.6-busing policy, we've taken action to have a look at the 1.6-busing policy.

I have to say, if you take a jurisdictional scan, Mr. Speaker, throughout other provinces across the country – and I have a report that I'd like to

table here today and it outlines the actual busing policies right across this country. Newfoundland and Labrador certainly stands third across the country.

With regard to the issue, children safety is always paramount in our view as well, and, certainly, anything that you (inaudible) –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

MR. TIBBS: Mr. Speaker, I strongly advocate for the Lionel Kelland Hospice in my District of Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans, which was a priority to our party. During the election campaign, the government announced a commitment to support the proposed hospice.

I ask the Premier: Will the budget that you are tabling here today include funding for this project, as we can get started so less people can die in hallways of hospitals without dignity in death?

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

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

Thank you for the question from the new Member opposite. The issue of hospice care is topical. We have said that we will support the Lionel Kelland Hospice in its establishment and operation.

We are arranging to meet, again, with the board of Lionel Kelland Hospice to see what specific requirements they have, and I will be happy to keep the House informed of our progress, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

MR. TIBBS: Mr. Speaker, this is the same board that the government has met with many times before. The Premier did not answer my question, neither did the minister if there is funding in this budget for the hospice.

Let me ask again: If there's no funding, where is the money coming from?

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

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

The exact flow of money through the system, as it were, is a matter for the Estimates Committee. I'd be happy to deal with that there. The issue of the hospice itself, we have said we are committed to the concept of hospice care. We're committed to the Lionel Kelland Hospice and happy to work through that and through Central Health probably for the establishment of such a facility there, just as we would with Eastern Health who have similarly expressed interest, Mr. Speaker.

The work is ongoing, happy to chat with the Member opposite and the board of Lionel Kelland.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

MS. COFFIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, government's own budget data shows, in *The Economy*, unemployment is going to rise over the next few years in 2020, '21, and '22. This ties in with the insolvency rate. Clearly, the Premier's Way Forward plan is not working.

I ask the Premier: Will he agree to develop a new jobs plan that will go beyond the Cabinet committee and actively involve all stakeholders at this time?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm very pleased to stand and answer the first question from the Leader of the NDP. Mr. Speaker, we put in place, back in 2016, a plan that was developed around partnerships, with industry, with businesses, with communities, associations and interest groups, including the volunteer sector, by the way, which we don't often talk about enough and the job creation that they do within our province.

Mr. Speaker, clearly that plan right now is demonstrated that we've seen 11 consecutive months, as the Minister of Finance has just mentioned, 11 consecutive months – if someone had forecasted that back in 2015, no one would have said that this province today would see job growth to this degree in our province.

Also, Mr. Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador will lead the country in GDP, economic growth within the country. These are statistics that we're proud of. The plan that we put in place in 2016 is working and it's attracting investment and creating jobs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

MS. COFFIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In addition to that, will the Premier commit to use the carbon tax proceeds to create a permanent green jobs fund that will help small green businesses to innovate and create green jobs?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We see significant interest in what a new green economy would look like. That was one of the reasons why we put in place a hybrid which is part of the Pan-Canadian framework on climate change. Mr. Speaker, we participated in that. While other provinces would disagree maybe with the approach that we have taken and other provinces that have disagreed of what they've seen as their constituents and their residents opposed to a federal carbon tax, we took the opportunity to put in place a hybrid model for

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, which includes investment into green initiatives.

We see so many opportunities for young Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in some of the more traditional companies that we have doing work in our province, to work with people in this Legislature to make sure that that green economy is something that we can put a focus on and create even more jobs for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. J. DINN: Mr. Speaker, the Independent Expert Advisory Committee, or the IEAC, on methylmercury, fourth and last recommendation says: Nalcor Energy undertake targeted removal of soil and capping of wetlands in the future reservoir area before impoundment. The CEO of Nalcor says they will begin to raise water levels in the Muskrat reservoir this summer.

What is the Premier's position on this fourth recommendation?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If we go back and look at the history, the development of Muskrat Falls, even go back to the Joint Review Panel, which was put in place prior to sanction, a number of the recommendations, including things like how you deal with methylmercury, was not dealt with prior to sanction, and so it got us in a situation that we're into today.

Very pleased to say today that I did have a meeting with Indigenous leaders, primarily from Labrador – well, all from Labrador – on this very issue. If you remember that it was an historic event in our province back in October of 2016 when we first met to put an Independent Expert Advisory Committee in place. Of the four recommendations that are put in place, two of those are things that I think we can make success with and have success.

What we need right now, and what we agreed to in this morning's meeting, was to put in place a committee that would follow the implementation, which is a recommendation from the Independent Expert Advisory Committee that filed its report just last year.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The time for Oral Questions has ended.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Table of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Pursuant to section 26(5)(a) of the *Financial Administration Act*, I am tabling seven orders-in-council relating to funding pre-commitments for fiscal years 2020-21 and beyond.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I'll move the following motion: That the Striking Committee comprise the following Members: the Member for Burgeo - LaPoile, the Member for Burin - Grand Bank, the Member for St. John's West, the Member for St. John's Centre and the Member for Mount Pearl North.

And I further give notice that the Committees of the House of Assembly for the 49th General Assembly be constituted as follows:

The Public Accounts Committee: the Member for Cape St. Francis; the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave; the Member for St.

George's - Humber; the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune; the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels; the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port; the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

The Privileges and Elections Committee: the Member for St. George's - Humber; the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels; the Member for Burin - Grand Bank; the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island, and the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

The Standing Orders Committee: the Member for Burgeo - La Poile; the Member for St. John's West; the Member for St. George's - Humber; the Member for Windsor Lake, and the Member for St. John's Centre.

Finally, the Miscellaneous and Private Bills Committee: the Member for St. George's - Humber; the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave; the Member for Mount Scio; the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, and the Member for Conception Bay South.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

MR. SPEAKER: I see the gentleman for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There have been numerous concerns raised by family members of seniors in long-term care throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, particularly those suffering from dementia, Alzheimer's disease and other cognitive debilitating conditions whereby loved ones have experienced injuries, have not been bathed regularly, not received proper nutrition and/or have been left lying in their own waste for extended periods of time. We believe this is

directly related to government's failure to ensure adequate staffing at those facilities.

THEREFORE we petition the House of Assembly as follows:

To urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to instate legislation which includes the mandatory establishment of an adequate ratio of one staff for three residents in long-term care and all other applicable regional health facilities housing persons with dementia, Alzheimer's disease and other cognitive debilitating conditions in order to ensure appropriate safety, protection from injuries, proper hygiene care and all of the required care. This law would include the creation of a specific job position in these facilities for monitoring and intervention as required to ensure the safety of patients.

Mr. Speaker, I'm picking up where I left off at the last sitting on behalf of the group Advocates for Senior Citizens' Rights. They wish to continue with their campaign to ensure that we have adequate staffing in our long-term care facilities throughout the province, particularly and specifically as it relates to patients, as indicated in this petition, patients with dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

That is not to say – because every time I raised this in the past, the Minister of Health would stand and basically say that this is a shot about staff and so on. This is not about staff. This is not saying that people at these facilities are not doing the best they can with what they have, but what is being suggested here is that there's not always adequate staffing at these facilities to care for our most vulnerable seniors.

They want assurances through legislation – not through the policy of the health care authorities, not through regulations that could be changed by the minister of the day whenever he or she decides, but through legislation to enshrine the fact that there would be adequate staffing at these facilities to take care of our seniors.

This is, as I said, it's something I've presented numerous times and I will continue to do so as long as this group asks me to do so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further petitions?

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS many students within our province depend on school busing for transportation to and from school each day; and

WHEREAS there are many parents of school-aged children throughout the province who live inside the English School District's 1.6 kilometre zone, therefore do not qualify for busing; and

WHEREAS policy cannot override the safety of our children;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to eliminate the 1.6 kilometre policy for all elementary schools in the province and in junior and senior highs where safety is a concern.

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

Mr. Speaker, we've argued this and fought this and we'll continue to fight it. At the doors we heard this over and over again. Not only just me, but a lot of my colleagues around.

Now, it's unfortunate during QP that the new minister referred to an old plan the former minister was using, the jurisdictional scans and whatnot. That's not what the people in this province are looking for – not in my district.

This policy is outdated. It's long overdue to be reviewed and changed. You have children that are on four lanes of traffic with no sidewalks, are trying to get to school in the middle of the winter. We've said this in this House over and

over again. It bears repeating. We continue to argue for it.

And it's not just us, Mr. Speaker. We're representing districts. We have 15 representing districts here now that we believe this is a huge issue and we're just waiting for someone to finally – common sense has to prevail. People say this is a common sense issue, so we're hoping government will finally look and listen and take this policy, shelve it and review it and put a proper policy in place that's going to protect our children. Our children are our most valuable resource, and we need to do that now.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development for a response, please.

MR. WARR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And I thank the hon. Member for his petition.

Mr. Speaker, he's talking about making strides, and we are making strides. I can go back to a report that was tabled in September of 2018 where, at that time, we had 72 courtesy stops. Today, we have 649 courtesy stops and that's actually looking after thousands of children within our province.

The one thing that I will agree with him, Mr. Speaker, is that safety of our children is paramount. He is right in saying that. The safety of our children is paramount and we will do whatever we can to continue to review the policies to make changes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further petitions?

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The government now requires regional health authorities to strictly enforce a policy that requires all applicants being assessed to have a physical care need to qualify for admission to a personal care home.

Seniors with issues such as anxiety, depression, fear of falling and loneliness are no longer eligible. Many seniors who would have qualified just months ago are now being denied access.

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to revise the policy on personal care home access.

Mr. Speaker, we've spoken to this a number of times before the election. It was relevant then and it was known within the public that families, seniors and the general population had a real concern about the change in the operations of the policy that is in play with the regional health authorities.

The real issue here is that we're separating physical health from mental health. We've tried to over the last number of years in this House, and we've done it very eloquently and we've done it very efficiently, about connecting the two, that it's very important that we make sure good, personal, physical health falls in line with good mental health.

In this case, we're separating it. When you're talking about a vulnerable part of our society, seniors, who now for circumstances that have changed in their living circumstance, a loved one has passed away, family members have moved away, their ability to be able to stay in a certain home because of anxiety, because of fear, because of loneliness, is not taken into account. When they could be put in an environment which is much more conducive to a quality of life, much more conducive to their long-term physical health and much more conducive to their mental health.

So, we can't separate these two. If it's about money, we have to look at the long-term benefits by investing upfront, Mr. Speaker. We know the impact it has on families. We know the impact it's having on communities.

I know we've talked about it before, the Home First program that nobody denies. We're all supportive about being able to keep people in their homes with the supports they need, but we're talking about a vulnerable part of our society, seniors who want, who no longer feel comfortable living in that environment, who want to go into a personal care home to have other interactions, to dismiss with any of the issues, the anxieties, the fear of falling, the loneliness, and be part and parcel of a community-based support system there that, obviously, enhances their physical health and their mental health.

Why would we deny that, and on one side say it's about money, and yet say that we're going to spend more money in support services that they don't want and don't need because we have an alternative that works.

There are a multitude of approaches here. One is the Home First program, another is being able to get people into personal care homes and then there are other ones that look at long-term needs here. We need to be able to find the solution that works for a particular part of our society.

What we're doing here, we're dismissing a group of our society who has a need, we have a solution to that need, it's no more costly than any other solution we would do, but it does affect their mental and physical health, and we have an obligation and a responsibility to ensure that they have an opportunity to excel because they can access those services.

Mr. Speaker, we'll be presenting this many more times in this House of Assembly.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services for a response, please.

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

I think the Member opposite is correct when he states that there are a variety of ways of looking

after seniors and vulnerable folk in the community.

With particular reference to the comments around the petition, there have been no change in the criteria for admission to personal care homes; it is a personal care need that has to be identified. This includes mental health and mental wellness. Indeed, there were personal care home operators on the radio during the recent election campaign referencing the fact that they were having clients admitted with these kinds of diagnoses, so I would refute some of the presumptions underlying the petition.

We are, in actual fact, doing what the Member opposite asked, which is we are working with personal care home operators to revise, update and make more nuanced the admission criteria for physical and mental illness and wellness to personal care homes, including things like the access to day programming facilities. So we are actually doing what the petition has asked for, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further petitions?

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, I call Orders of the Day, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Orders of the Day, Sir.

Orders of the Day

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

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

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 6.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, and I would move the following motion, Mr. Speaker, that Standing Order 74 be amended by adding immediately after Standing Order 74(2) the following: (3) Notwithstanding Standing Order 74(2), where a

head of expenditure has been referred to a committee established under Standing Order 72 and the time used in debate of that head of expenditure exceeds three hours, the additional time shall also be deducted from the time allocated under Standing Order 71.

Now, I won't take a significant amount of time to speak to this proposed change, except to provide, perhaps, some knowledge as to how it came to be here today, and perhaps more importantly the relevancy of it and what I think is the importance of it.

So, as all Members know or are about to find out, one of the big parts of the budget process is the Estimates, as they're called, which are all handled by Committees of the House, and actually they will be beginning tonight with Justice Estimates. And again, to those that might be watching, if I were to try to explain, it's an opportunity – and I personally feel that Estimates are the best part of any budget. Whether you're in government or Opposition, it's a great chance where you're not constrained by time so much as you are in the House, where you can sit down, ask questions and get answers. I think it works for everybody to find out a real understanding of the budgetary allocations of any particular department.

So, for instance, tonight the Justice department will sit here, staff officials, and on the other side you'll have Members of the Committee belonging to Social Services, which there are a number of Members. But primarily, the big reason for it is that you'll have Members from the Opposition sitting on the other side as well, whether it's the Official Opposition, the NDP, our independent Members, and they have an opportunity to sit there, usually for a prescribed amount of time, which is three hours, and to go back and forth asking questions.

It's not just sometimes like you see in Question Period where there are the political or partisan overtones. In many cases, it's about finding that information. This is what you were budgeted to spend; this is what you actually spent. Can you give us some background on that? Can you talk about policy? Again, I've seen these be very useful. I've seen some where ministers would obfuscate and not provide as much information, but either way I think it's a useful exercise.

Each one of those is three hours long. Now, we all know that the budget goes up to 75 hours and is made up of Estimates, Interim Supply, budget debate, Concurrence, you name it. I still think this is the most important and each one is three hours. Now, I'll say this and I know that the staff at the Table will remind me if I'm wrong, as they usually do, they'll look up and they'll shake their head, or they'll nod their head, or they'll let me know when I make a mistake but it's three hours.

If the Opposition stops asking questions after two hours, it still counts as three hours towards the budgetary timeline. So, it still counts as three towards that 75. But, in some cases, as I've seen – for instance, in my first year doing Estimates we sat for 4½ hours. It was great. I felt that it was productive. I think the Members of the Opposition that participated felt it was productive and we went for 4½, but the problem is that the extra hour and a half does not count towards the budgetary timeline. So, there was actually no benefit to perhaps me doing it, providing that extra time in terms of going towards the budget. I think the benefit was to everybody, though.

What we're saying here with this resolution which I'm hoping will be supported unanimously – and I'll give the reason for it as well – is that it provides, I think, an incentive for departments to provide as much time as possible – even though there is no need to do that. Some departments take longer, some departments are shorter. Myself, personally, I feel it's better for this process if we sit there and give as much time, but I can understand why a minister may also chose not to do that and, in many cases, it's a lot to bring together your whole department for a night, plus the prep work that goes into it.

This is something that I think will be beneficial to all. I think it's beneficial to the people that we represent in that the Opposition having as much time as necessary to ask these questions and get answers, it guides them and it guides all of us in terms of Question Period.

I don't think it helps anybody if these Estimates are constrained by time, which is why I think ministers and departments need to feel that if they put the extra time in – for instance, as I said the 4½ hours that I done before, it's not just me

giving my time, it's staff. It's staff giving their time, and many of these people are giving up a significant amount of time. There's a benefit to this.

This was brought up – and I'll talk more about Standing Orders tomorrow – by the Members of the Standing Orders Committee. Ms. Michael, who was here today, was a Member of that Committee, myself, the Official Opposition House Leader was there and Members on this side as well. This was one of the issues we brought up and said we think this would be a positive change. We think it would help the budget process.

I will say, and Members will find out, I'm sure, that sometimes the debate on the budget proper, on the budget motion sometimes, can be a bit repetitive, can maybe not be as informative, I guess, is just my little opinion, but I think the Estimates is something that is beneficial, so we're putting this resolution forward.

It was agreed to unanimously by the Standing Orders Committee. I think like anything that we do with a Standing Order, if we chose to do something and it does not work, we always, as a House, have the right to go back and change that because Standing Orders govern how this House operates. We all want the best operating House we can have that benefits us all, benefits the people we represent.

On that note, I'll take my seat, listen to my colleagues across the way and, hopefully, we can vote on this resolution and move forward so that we actually can hear the budget later on.

Thank you.

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's an honour to stand here and talk about our Standing Order 74. I'll start by how we'll end this, that we wholeheartedly support this. The Government House Leader is exactly right. This has been a discussion that's gone on for well over a year about how we change the Standing Orders here to make it more efficient and make it more reflective of the discussion in the House,

particularly around what we consider one of the most important components of what we do in the House of Assembly is Estimates and the debate we have on the budget that represents the needs and the programs and services of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

While we wholeheartedly support the opportunity for having a minister and all the relevant staff and having a committee made up of all three parties and independents and any Member of the House of Assembly who can assemble here to ask questions relevant to that particular department and the headings are very important.

The only caveat we've had some discussion around from a caucus point of view and that we want to put on the table is, at the same point, we want to ensure that while – where a minister who's open to extend it for the open discussion to ensure all questions are answered, that that time should count, and we agree with that.

It's Estimates. It's debate. It shouldn't be extra time put in and not allocated, but on the same side, there's a fear here – it happens rarely, but it does happen with certain ministers – that when debate happens, at the three hour time they cut it off, that it still should be open until the Committee is comfortable asking all the questions and referring to all the headings, that that also would be an understanding that would happen.

I know that's not what's being put forward here, but I do want to have that tabled here because that's also important. While we support the extra time that is put forward by a department, it should be allocated and counted. It makes sense because it's open debate on the budget, an opportunity for everybody to know and hear, and it's transparent. The questions and answers are for the general public to be able to review.

It's great for any party then to have that information so they can avail of the services and put out the information to their constituents, but also particularly for critics so they would have an understanding of any other clarification they may need in the House in Question Period to divulge a little bit more information to the general public here.

The concern we had in our caucus was around what happens if we do get a minister who says they don't like the tone of the questioning, at three hours I'm cutting it off. That then becomes a concern for us because, at the end of the day, due diligence is about getting to reveal all the issues and all the programs and all the nuances that are in a particular budget or budget line, to ensure everybody understands what they can avail of, everybody understands how this is going to benefit the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, or would understand exactly what the restrictions are on the monies that are going to be allocated for that particular line item.

So, there's a concern. It's not a burning one at this point because most ministers have been extremely co-operative in understanding that, but it has happened in the past.

I had the privilege of sitting in the Chair, as chairing for nearly three years, a multitude of Committees on budget lines and there are some times ministers, and it's happened with all administrations, who are not as co-operative, who are not quite open to answering all the questions, as to pass it off over a period of time. So it does become a concern for us to talk about.

I would hope that we'll bring this up again in Standing Committee meetings down the road to ensure that doesn't happen. I'm hoping the ministers that are across from us here now will be very co-operative. If it takes four hours – and I know the Minister of Justice has no qualms, he's done it in the past, and I would think other ministers would be open – that if it takes 3½ hours, if it takes three hours and one minute, if it takes four hours and one minute, that they're open to do that, particularly now knowing that that time counts towards budget debate.

To have a proper budget debate, and we're talking in a unique situation in the House of Assembly about openness and transparency, what better way to do that by showing we're open to have a full debate on any particular line item in the budget so that it's all clarified, and whoever leaves this House on the committee side understands exactly what was meant and what the intent of the monies being expended in those particular line items are to benefit the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Then they are more equipped to be able to explain to

their constituents and to the people of this province what it is this money is going to be used for.

So we have no qualms and we support the resolution here now, the Standing Orders amendment, but we do want to have it noted that as we go forward in the Standing Orders Committee this would be a note there. We do ask the co-operation from the ministers as we start Estimates tonight, that if it takes a little bit longer that all are co-operative in being able to do that.

So we do stand to support it, and we look forward to the Estimates process over the next two weeks.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

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

MR. J. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We will also support this motion, and as brand new MHAs, I think when you look at the Estimates committee process it will be extremely valuable to us.

The only concern we would have, of course – and, again, it comes from our own inexperience and newness to this – is the amount of time that might be taken away from the budget debate itself; but, however, we'd see a lot more benefits to us in the long run.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to take a couple of moments now to make a couple of comments on this.

First of all, of course, as an independent Member, and myself and my colleague here, we're not part of the Standing Orders Committee, so when we have this unanimous

concurrence on this, I would just say for the record, it may be unanimous minus two; unanimous by 38, not unanimous by 40 per se. That's not saying I'm against it, but I do make the point for a reason.

Mr. Speaker, I absolutely understand the value of Estimates. I have no issue with the fact that if there's going to be time beyond the three hours taken for Estimates, that it should come off the 75 hours. I do question and wonder, though, that if the opposite were to happen and we only took two hours, for argument's sake – although, I don't know if I've ever seen that happen; I think once or twice, depending on the department, but generally speaking you use most of the three hours.

I do wonder if there was any consideration that if it was less than three hours, let's say it took two hours, why we're going to take three hours off, but if we go four hours we're going to take the four hours off. So you're going to have – to my mind, why do you have it both ways? If you're going to use the time, use the time. If you only take two, two should come off; not three if you only use two. So that would be just one point on that.

The other thing I'll say again, just for the record here, that we've had practice here in the House, past practice, that while the independent Members or Member, depending on what it was at the time, may not have been part of these Committees. We had the opportunity to sit on Committee, if we wished to, and I certainly have sat in on the majority of them in my time as being an independent.

There was always some time allotted, by leave, I guess, of Committee to allow the independent Members to ask a few questions if there was something that wasn't already asked, something that wasn't addressed and so on. While that is absolutely appreciated, and I would certainly hope the same thing will happen again this time as in the past, I would like to see somewhere – and I say to the Committee, I would like to see recognition somewhere in the Standing Orders, some absolute recognition of that fact for independent Members.

I can understand in the past it was totally a party system. And, yes, there have been some

independents, primarily because they left or they were booted from a particular caucus or whatever and they ended up sitting as independents, but in this particular case we have two independents now who were actually elected by the people as independents, which makes it, I think, different. I think it's a reality of how a lot of people are feeling. There were nine people who ran as independents in the last election. There could be 29 next time, I don't know. But it is a reality and I think there has to be some recognition for it.

So I just say, for the purposes of what's being proposed here, I'll support it. Again, I think if you're going to take away time because you use extra time, I think by the same token if you use less time, than less time should be taken off. Again, I would like to see some actual recognition in the Standing Orders of the role of duly elected independent Members and their right on behalf of the people they represent to participate in the Estimates process.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands.

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm going to stand just to concur with the colleague from Mount Pearl - Southlands about the changes that should be in the Standing Orders. I'll just give you a good example. I won't keep you long. I will be supporting the motion.

Mr. Speaker, just say, for example, a prime example, the hospital in Corner Brook is a major issue. All during the election, we hear at the hospital in Corner Brook that workers should be hired as local workers. I'm not making any suggestion that the Minister of Health or the Minister of Transportation would ever do this, but if I'm in the Estimates and I'm asking questions about why local workers are not being hired, they can say no leave and I can't ask a question in Estimates. That's the number one issue for the West Coast of the province, is the hospital and local workers that I heard at the doors.

Seventy per cent of people say go in and find out what's going on. I'm not saying it would happen, but there is a good possibility, Mr. Speaker, that somebody can just say no leave, you can't ask questions in Estimates. So we have to make some changes to the Standing Orders Committee. With independents now in this House – duly-elected independents in this House, we should have the same rights as anybody in this House of Assembly and the Standing Orders must reflect that.

On the issue now, when we discuss the hours, how many hours there should be accounted for, it should be if you go over three hours, add it. If you go less than three hours, we should take it back and make sure that there is 75 hours. If there is 75 hours for debate, let's have 75 hours. I have been into discussions in Estimates on both sides, as on the Opposition and as a minister where it didn't take three hours to get done. Sometimes you get through a bit quicker; they look for information. All my dealings, even when I was in the Opposition asking the government, the PC government at the time, if you got the information, if they couldn't get it, they would supply it to you later. I know a lot of ministers opposite would do the same thing. If they haven't got the information, they would supply it later, so that would speed up the process because you'll say we'll give you the information later.

Mr. Speaker, I am in agreement with this here, but I am convinced that we must change the Standing Orders so the independents – which is a reality in Newfoundland and Labrador now, if there are independents in this House, we should have the same rights to ask questions in Estimates as any other Member in this House and not leave it up to somebody to say no leave or yes, leave.

The point about leave and no leave in this House, Mr. Speaker, you'll never know who said it. You don't have to announce which person, which minister, which Member. It could be PC, it could be NDP, it could be a Liberal Member or could be a Liberal minister. There's no statutory law or rule in this House to say identify who did not give you leave and that takes away the rights of independents.

So I think we should now change the Standing Orders to give all of us the flexibility because, as elected officials, we have a right to bring up what's very important to us. What's very important to Western Newfoundland is the hospital, our local workers. I expect and I hope before Estimates starts that we'll have the changes in the Standing Orders so that we can have proper leave to ask the questions that we've been elected to ask in this hon. House.

Thank you, Minister.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I appreciate the commentary from my colleagues across the way. I think we all have our heads facing in the same direction. We all know that when it comes to the operation of the House that we've had to change how the House operates, and I don't mind saying, to provide some context on how the Standing Orders have evolved just over the last few years.

The Standing Orders have been in place for many, many, many years. Some of them are quite arcane, antiquated and have not changed. I'm willing to say – and I'm quite proud of it actually – I'm quite proud of it that over the last three years, through co-operation of Members, we have made more changes to the Standing Orders than you saw in the decades before perhaps combined.

I take pride in that because it was a case of people talk about working together in committees – well, that's what it was. It was Members of different caucuses working together to make those changes. So I am proud of that, but the fact is that there's more change that's required.

So perhaps the best thing that I can do – because I want to respond to each of the Member's concerns and to say that, firstly, I appreciate the support for this and I know there will be a unanimous support for this resolution, but the second thing is I will provide some assurance that I'm always willing to work together to make change that's positive to this House.

I say to my House Leader colleague from across the way, again, thank you. He was a part of this deliberation and I've appreciated his contributions over the last little while. I understand he's not on the Standing Orders Committee anymore and he will be sorely missed from that Committee.

What I will say is that I appreciate his concern and I have seen that happen in the past when you talk about, quite frankly, stonewalling by ministers, and I'm not putting a stripe on that or a colour on that. I think that comes down to perhaps a willingness to answer questions and, if that comes up, I think we can deal with that. We can remedy that.

What I will point out is that we cannot take away the flexibility to not answer the same question 15 times. And we've seen that in the past where you ask a question, you get an answer, you might not like it, you ask it again, you get the same answer and, at some point, you have to have the ability to say okay, this can go on forever. So, it's like a balancing act, but I do appreciate what he's saying and I think we should be on guard with that. My personal viewpoint is that if it takes all night and you get it done, it leaves less for people to question you about on accountability and transparency later, if you're willing to answer those questions. So I just put that out there.

I say to my colleagues from the NDP, thank you for your contributions. The fact is I don't think – and, again, it is something that I think you'll get the hang of extremely quickly, I have no doubt about that, but what I will say is I think you'll definitely share my view that the Estimates, when it's all said and done, is perhaps the most substantive and best part of the budget in terms of finding out information. We all know that there's the debate part, but I don't think that the extra time will take away from the substantive debate that continues on.

I will point out – and it's funny because recognizing my colleagues are new to the House, and I had a conversation with somebody earlier where I talked about sometimes it doesn't matter how long you're here, the fact is we're all rookies. I've already made a rookie mistake. I'd like to have this motion seconded by my colleague, the Minister of Natural Resources.

First day in, standing up and forgetting how the rules work, so that's all part of it, Mr. Speaker.

I say to my colleagues, the independents in the back, I appreciate your thirst for change and the fact is that we do have some change. I will point out that you're not the first independents to sit in the House. I know Yvonne Jones sat here for three years – three years as an independent in this House and, for whatever reason, I don't think the changes were made then.

What I'm willing to point out, though, is that I've shown, along with the work of all Members of this House, that we are willing to make change when it's warranted, but it takes time. The Member for Humber - Bay of Islands said: I want to see it happen today. It's not going to happen today. It takes time to figure this out. It takes deliberation. It takes research by our staff here, because it's very easy to come in and make a change to a hundred-year-old rule and then you think about, oh, I didn't realize that was the repercussions or the impact of making that change, even if it seems right, even if it feels right.

So what I will say is that we're all quite aware of your position on this. I would encourage you to reach out to the Standing Orders Committee, as well as all committees, because we have to continue to work together. I know that you've put those concerns on the record and, with a new Parliament sitting here, I think those concerns should be put on record.

What I will point out to all Members is that when the Estimates start tonight, every Member of this House has the ability to sit in here – and I've never seen questions turned down. In fact, there were times before, depending on the Estimates, where the Opposition parties, and certainly I was one of them, where I might not be wanting to give up my time to somebody else to ask questions because it was stuck at three hours.

Again, we had minister that would stonewall; they would just take time to put out information that was not always the most relevant to the debate. Again, I don't put a stripe on that. That's why, as an Opposition Member, you're afraid to give up your time because you might have some burning question that you wanted answered, you

wouldn't get the time to do it. With the change that we have put in here today, I don't think that's going to be an issue. I think there's enough time – obviously, like anything, we had to put a reasonableness on this, but I think we've shown over the past few years that that part of the budget debate seems to have worked.

The last thing I'll say is there was no discussion even amongst the Opposition Members of the Standing Orders Committee, that if you use less time, that it should not be counted. I will point out, from a departmental point of view you put a ridiculous amount of time into prep for Estimates. Your staff are here, and if you come in and the Opposition chooses not to ask – I think it's incumbent on Oppositions to come prepared to ask those questions, and if they choose for strategic reasons or otherwise not to ask questions, then you've just wasted time of a bunch of civil servants who've been working on this for weeks and months.

I still think when you add it all up – and I'm just speaking of my experience of being parts of budgets since, basically, 2012. I've never seen anybody walk out and say we didn't put enough time into debate of that budget. Nobody's walked away and said I didn't have enough time to get my concerns forward. The fact is – the reality is that most people are saying: my God, I can't believe that person has said this X number of times. And I say that from sitting on the Opposition side and speaking at every possible moment I could.

So this, I think, is a good step forward, but as a Standing Orders Committee – again, I know there's a private Member's resolution tomorrow that speaks to Standing Orders. So this is a topic I think we'll see a lot of in the coming years. And you know what, I think, like anything, we've indicated we're willing to change. It takes time, but the willingness is the most important part.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Is the House ready for the question?

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: All those against?

The motion is carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I would call from the Order Paper – I would move the following motion, seconded by the Minister of Natural Resources, that the composition of the Resource Committee, the Government Services Committee and the Social Services Committee will be as follows:

The Government Services Committee will consist of the Members for the following districts: the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave; Conception Bay South; Ferryland; Fogo Island - Cape Freels; Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune; Lewisporte - Twillingate; Mount Scio; and St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

The Resource Committee will consist of the Members for the following districts: the Member for St. George's - Humber; Cape St. Francis; Fogo Island - Cape Freels; Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune; Harbour Grace - Port de Grave; Mount Scio; St. John's East - Quidi Vidi; and Terra Nova.

And finally, the Social Services Committee will consist of the Members for the following districts: the Member for Lewisporte - Twillingate; Conception Bay East - Bell Island; Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune; Harbour Grace - Port de Grave; Mount Scio; St. George's - Humber; St. John's Centre; and Topsail - Paradise.

I'll take barely any time to talk about this, Mr. Speaker. These are generally referred to as Estimates Committees. They sit in this House. They are a Select Committee that are designed to look at the three different areas. And later on today I'll be speaking very quickly to the

different heads of expenditure that fall under these different Committees.

The important part to point out, because I had a panicked person say: Oh, my God, I'm on X number of Committees, am I going to have to do every Estimates everyday and night? No. The fact is there are substitutions that happen on both sides. Generally, government Members sit there to ensure there is a majority or that there is a quorum, and on the Opposition side it's a fact of having the proper, usually, critic for each department sitting in asking the questions, along with their researcher. Substitutions happen everyday, something we've dealt with, and substitutions also happen on the government side. So these names are set in place, but the fact is they are not carved in stone in terms of actually who appears.

On that note, I will take my seat, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: I would ask the Government House Leader, did I get a seconder that time?

MR. A. PARSONS: (Inaudible.)

MR. SPEAKER: Okay. Thank you, Sir.

Excellent, excellent.

The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll just confer that the Members that are put forward here represent all the Members of the House of Assembly, particularly the three parties. We do open up, particularly, debate in any Estimates. All Members of the House of Assembly are allowed to attend – and the answers to the questions that are being posed here.

Like the Government House Leader has said, there's a process in play where we'll get to be more encompassing, a little bit more inclusive to all Members of the House of Assembly. There's a process that needs to be put in play. Our hope is that we move that as quickly as possible in the next meetings of the Standing Orders Committee to make that happen.

We're looking forward to Estimates as they start tonight and as they roll out over the next nine nights and days to ensure that the information is out there for the general public, and all Members of this House of Assembly to be able to share with their respective districts and the people they represent.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further speakers to the motion?

Seeing none, is the House ready for the question?

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: All those against?

This motion is carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I call from the Order Paper, Order 2.

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Premier, that the House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, on April 16 of this year we brought forward a budget, and on April 17 we committed

to taking this budget to the people of the province.

Mr. Speaker, we committed at that time that this budget we would bring back to the House if we were given another mandate, and today that is what we are doing. I will not rehash the entire speech; that speech was read in this hon. House. It's on the record in *Hansard* and it's published on the Department of Finance website. Instead, Mr. Speaker, I would like to recap just some of the highlights from the budget for the year ahead to remind those in this House, and those that are watching from home, what we brought to the table.

Mr. Speaker, with *Budget 2019* consumers can rest easy. There are no tax or fee increases. In addition, this year we are eliminating the tax on automobile insurance in its entirety. This change will be implemented in July and will be retroactive to April 15, 2019.

This year, we are making changes necessary to put a stop to the unfair practice of clawing back children's benefits from families on Income Support, which was a disadvantage to some of our most vulnerable children and families. We will amend the Income and Employment Support Regulations to exempt payments from child support of the Canada Pension Plan Disabled Contributor's Benefit, and the Canada Pension Plan Surviving Child Benefit for the purposes of determining eligibility for Income Support. Further amendments will be made to ensure that child maintenance payments will not be clawed back from Income Support.

Mr. Speaker, the cost of delivering health care in this province grew by more than 50 per cent between 2007 and 2015 due to many factors, including the introduction of new drugs and new technologies. This considerable growth and how to best manage it is an issue being experienced by all provinces.

Our government has made great strides to curb that growth rate and make better use of the roughly \$3 billion that we spend on health care annually. In fact, the Canadian Institute for Health Information has reported that Newfoundland and Labrador has seen the third lowest growth rate in Canada over the last three years.

Mr. Speaker, we have achieved this while making significant – and necessary improvements – to home and community care supports, mental health and addictions services, health infrastructure and primary health care.

By working smarter and being open to partnerships, we are: Well into construction of a new 145-bed long-term care home in Corner Brook; the building of a new ambulatory care unit in Carbonear, which is in addition to the 28 long-term care beds that were opened in that community; we are just weeks away from starting construction of a new protective care unit in Botwood, long-term care homes in Gander and in Grand Falls-Windsor, as well as a new mental health care addictions hospital here in St. John's, as well as a six-bed mental health unit at the Labrador Health Centre in Happy Valley-Goose Bay; construction of a new acute care hospital in Corner Brook will start in 2019.

This year the Minister of Health and Community Services will be launching a new program that will provide children starting kindergarten with access to free, comprehensive eye exams from an optometrist. Our government will contribute \$250,000 in coverage for children by supporting the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Optometrists so they can deliver the Eye See Eye Learn Program. This initiative will allow children to overcome potential barriers to eye exams and contribute to a more positive learning experience, as well as an overall improvement to their quality of life.

Mr. Speaker, our government will increase services and supports for people across the autism spectrum and their families. This year, we have allocated \$2.5 million, growing to \$5 million in following years, to implement an Autism Action Plan. This plan will take a whole of government approach in the provision of services to people with autism and their families.

Our government will be expanding the Insulin Pump Program. While we continue to work with Eastern Health to complete a review of that program, we are immediately lifting the age cap for those currently enrolled. This means that individuals currently relying on the program are not at risk of losing their current coverage or having to take on a new financial burden once they reach the age of 25.

This year, 15 new drug therapies will be added to the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program. Eight of those are for oncology.

Mr. Speaker, building on the additional 1,000 affordable child care spaces created since last year, *Budget 2019* allocates approximately \$60 million for early childhood development, which includes \$7.4 million through an agreement with the federal government. These investments will provide \$17 million for the Child Care Services Subsidy Program to reduce costs for individual families; it will provide \$11 million to continue the Operating Grant Program which improves accessibility of child care for low- and middle-income families; and provide an income enhancement to qualified early childhood educators working in regulated child care to help improve the quality of child care services.

Mr. Speaker, our government's Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement supports low-income seniors, individuals and families, and persons with disabilities. Through the Income Supplement, qualifying families would be eligible to receive upwards to \$650 a year, with an additional \$200 for each child.

Through the Newfoundland and Labrador Seniors' Benefit, we are providing up to \$1,313 annually to adults age 65 and older. Mr. Speaker, approximately 70 per cent of those single beneficiaries are women. The total investment this year is \$123 million.

Currently, our seniors enjoy a discount when they register their vehicles. Mr. Speaker, this year, we are increasing that discount. As a result of *Budget 2019* when seniors renew their vehicle at the counter, the price will fall below \$100. For seniors that renew online, the fee will be less than \$90.

As well, Mr. Speaker, this year we are introducing a discount for our veterans who have served our country so bravely. We are applying a 10 per cent discount on vehicle registration for those who have a veteran plate.

Mr. Speaker, we have prioritized safe and sustainable communities. *Budget 2019* commits \$42 million in provincial funds for projects under the Investing in Canada Plan and a combined investment of \$91 million in the

Municipal Operating Grant Program, the gas tax program, Special Assistance Grants and the Community Employment Enhancement Program.

In 2019, we are making our Fire Protection Vehicle Program work better for communities and fire departments. *Budget 2019* introduces \$2.88 million for the replacement of fire protection vehicles and firefighting equipment. This reflects an increase of \$1 million, creating more options for communities to access funding for both used and new vehicles, as well as \$101,000 for grants to the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Fire Services to support operations and the Learn Not to Burn Program.

Mr. Speaker, with an investment of \$242,000, offset by federal funding, the Drug Treatment Court in St. John's addresses the underlying issues that contribute to crime by offering court-monitored treatment, random and frequent drug testing, incentives and sanctions, clinical case management and social services support. It is crucial that people in Newfoundland and Labrador have faith in the administration of justice.

Our Serious Incident Response Team will be operational this year, providing an increased level of transparency for police and helping ensure people have trust in the system. SIRT will investigate serious incidents involving the police and it is not intended to replace other mechanisms currently in place. The establishment of a provincial SIRT was a recommendation from the Inquiry into the Death of Donald Dunphy.

To support improved police oversight, we have allocated an annual investment of \$500,000 for a provincial stand-alone team. As outlined by the Minister of Justice and Public Safety last month, *Budget 2019* includes \$354,000 for bail supervision and electronic monitoring programs to help lower levels of recidivism and improve safety for women.

Budget 2019 also provides, through the Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment, in partnership with Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro, a Heat Pump Rebate Program to assist homeowners in increasing the energy efficiency of their homes. The program

budget will be \$1 million, and homeowners can receive a grant of \$1,000 towards the purchase and installation of an eligible heat pump.

Mr. Speaker, our rolling five-year infrastructure plan from 2019-20 to 2023-24 totals \$3 billion. This plan is helping to stimulate economic activity, create jobs and provide access to modern facilities. This year, our plan includes a total investment of \$594.3 million for new and existing schools, health care facilities, post-secondary institutions, roads and bridges, justice facilities, affordable housing and municipal infrastructure. This investment will generate close to \$580 million in economic activity and 5,100 person years of employment.

Our government is pleased to allocate \$600,000 to advance construction of a new adult correctional facility in St. John's. This is the first step towards replacing an antiquated facility that no longer meets the needs of those incarcerated. It will ensure the safety of employees and correctional officers, providing them with a modern working environment. We are also allocating \$1 million to expand the Labrador Correctional Centre in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, which will increase capacity and the potential to allow women to be housed at a facility, closer to children and family members.

This fiscal year, our government will match the roads budget of \$77.2 million for each of the last two years. This year, we are allocating more than \$40 million for the remaining contracts to complete the Trans-Labrador Highway. Mr. Speaker, with completion in sight, a fully paved Trans-Labrador Highway will open up opportunities for businesses and residents.

Budget 2019 will allocate approximately \$13.6 million, including funding from the federal government, for local and rural highways. For the first time in our province's history, centre line rumble strips will be added to the Veterans Memorial Highway and construction of climbing lanes at four locations of the highway will be completed to create a safer environment for all motorists.

These improvements not only mean safer roads and fewer accidents for our residents in communities such as Bay Roberts, Carbonear and Spaniard's Bay, but they also support the

continued economic growth of the region and efficient transportation of goods. These investments in the roads program, along with the work on the Team Gushue Highway and the Trans-Labrador Highway, will be supported by an investment of \$131.4 million this year.

Mr. Speaker, *Budget 2019* allocates \$13 million, an increase of \$6 million from last year, to continue the implementation of the Education Action Plan and support better outcomes for students. Through the plan, we are implementing over 80 actions and hiring 350 teacher resources over a three-year period to ensure students have access to the supports they need.

In *Budget 2019*, a new 18-week Aquaculture Training Program will begin to be piloted this fall at the Burin Campus. This new program, supported by an investment of more than \$236,000, will address skill shortages in this sector by targeting both basic skills needed to obtain and maintain employment as well as the technical skills required for employment in the aquaculture industry, in partnership with the Marine Institute and in consultation with industry.

This year, we are also investing more than \$858,000 to pilot a new Geological Technician Certificate Program at the College of the North Atlantic's Grand Falls-Windsor campus, which is scheduled to begin this fall. This will strengthen the connection between industry and courses provided by our post-secondary institutions.

Mr. Speaker, we are allocating \$39.2 million to begin construction of schools in Gander, Paradise, St. Alban's and Coley's Point in 2019. We are also allocating \$14.5 million for repairs and maintenance of existing schools, including Bishop Feild, which is expected to reopen in winter of 2020.

Mr. Speaker, given the remote offshore operating environment for oil producers in this province, digital innovations could substantially benefit the local industry and accelerate the pace of innovation already underway. This is why we are investing \$3 million this year to create a Digital Ocean Innovation Centre of Excellence for this valuable work to occur. The centre will enhance the province's digital capabilities in

emerging technology sectors, as well as support the goals of *Advance 2030* and the Ocean Supercluster.

In *Budget 2019*, we are also contributing a further \$2.5 million to support a Subsea Centre of Excellence for training, research and product testing.

Through our Way Forward plan, our government is working with industry, community, other levels of government, as well as academic and research institutions to support economic development and job growth. With more than \$18 billion attracted in new investments in such industries as our oil and gas sector and our mining sector, the message is strong, Mr. Speaker, our approach is working. We have had 11 consecutive months of year over year job growth. Employment in this province is expected to average 228,100 person-years of employment in 2019, which reflects continued growth over 2018.

Newfoundland and Labrador is open for business, and companies from around the world want to do business in our province. Our collaborative approach to working with businesses – both large and small – are leading to business development, creating jobs and benefiting communities. We are backing up that support with more than \$100 million in industry development, which will help create even more jobs.

Our government has a track record of job creation. Some of those examples, Mr. Speaker, include S&P Data, a North American contact centre that we supported in 2018, which is on its way to creating more than 500 new jobs, with close to 300 people already employed in this province.

In Placentia, approximately 1,900 people were working on the West White Rose Project this year. Vale's construction of its underground mine at Voisey's Bay will extend the mine's life by at least 15 years. With construction underway, there are approximately 2,000 people working on the project in Labrador and in Long Harbour. IOC has started its new open pit in Wabush, which will help sustain roughly 1,800 jobs and the mine for up to 50 years.

Mr. Speaker, we have also seen the recent reopening of the Beaver Brook Antimony Mine in Central Newfoundland and the 100 new jobs that that will create. We have seen the start of mining of fluorspar at St. Lawrence, which employs more than 250 people.

Additionally, mineral shipment projections for this year are 38 per cent higher than they were in 2018. It is also an industry that is forecasted to employ 5,100 people directly in operations, as well as an additional 1,200 people from mining construction. Mr. Speaker, that will bring the total employment forecast for 2019 to 6,300 people – an 11 per cent increase over 2018.

To sustain this progress, \$4.6 million is available for Investment in Geological Survey; and \$1.7 million through the Mineral Incentive Program, which includes \$100,000 for Junior Exploration Assistance Programs encouraging mineral exploration.

Mr. Speaker, we are supporting greater science in geo-science exploration. This year, we are adding \$250,000 to expand the Geo-Science Exploration Program. As reflected by the benefits of seismic activity in the offshore, with greater geosciences capacity comes greater exploration and greater investment.

The Grieg aquaculture project will generate approximately 800 new jobs in and around Marystown, with approximately 440 direct jobs at Grieg NL and processing facilities, as well as approximately 380 other jobs in affiliated sectors.

Through *Advance 2030*, our government is working with industry to position Newfoundland and Labrador globally as a preferred location for oil and gas development. We anticipate 100 new exploration wells being drilled, and that our offshore will be producing more than 650,000 barrels of oil equivalent per day, and direct employment totalling more than 7,500 people. We have been working with industry, as well as Memorial University's Marine Institute, which is one of the top maritime universities in the world, to identify infrastructure needs and expand innovation service providers to offer dedicated support to businesses in the ocean technology sector.

In *Budget 2019*, \$2.5 million is being contributed towards the construction of a new 36,000-square-foot facility at the Marine Institute's Holyrood Marine Base. This base is an integral part of the innovation ecosystem in Newfoundland and Labrador. In addition to supporting education and research, the new facility will accelerate the growth of ocean technology firms through the provision of space and the latest technologies to test products.

This year we will invest \$250,000 to launch an ocean technology competition, focused on developing solutions that solve Newfoundland and Labrador's unique challenges. The Newfoundland and Labrador technology sector includes almost 600 businesses, generating approximately 6,500 jobs. Supporting greater research and development has proven outcomes and will help attract new researchers and investment to this province, as well as help expand key industries.

As a government, we view ourselves as a partner in creating a culture where such innovation and entrepreneurship can flourish. To support access to much-needed capital investment and support a climate where such innovation can occur, we are allocating almost \$14 million in *Budget 2019*.

Mr. Speaker, I had the good fortune of joining the Ministers of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation and Advanced Education Skills and Labour to announce a key step to explore opportunities for additional growth potential for the aerospace industry through a \$200,000 investment.

The Department of AESL is adding a trade designation for the Air Maintenance Engineer Program at the College of the North Atlantic campus in Gander. We will be the second province in Canada to make this designation.

We are also working with the college and the federal government on further plans to upgrade and modernize the College of the North Atlantic's Gander campus aerospace programming. We look forward to working with such companies as EVAS Air and Provincial Aerospace to identify further opportunities that take full advantage of the growing market in the maintenance, repair and overhaul industry.

Our support for the tourism industry is a catalyst for economic development. The industry supports 2,600 businesses, nearly 20,000 jobs and generates more than a billion dollars in spending. To help create awareness of these wonderful experiences, our government will invest \$13 million in tourism marketing again this year. We will also use funds from the \$10 million Regional Development Fund to work with industry and community partners to support initiatives to advance economic development infrastructure, marketing, research and capability in areas such as tourism.

Building on our Tourism Product Development Plan, we will focus on enhancing tourism experiences. Further, we are committed to undertaking an action plan on the maintenance and growth of airline routes and marketing.

Mr. Speaker, to assist the fishing enterprises in the wild and farmed fisheries adopt innovative, modern fishing practices in a globally competitive sector, we are allocating \$10 million under the Atlantic Fisheries Fund in *Budget 2019*. This fund enhances our ability to partner with the industry to meet growing market demands for sustainably sourced, high-quality fish and seafood products.

Mr. Speaker, last year, we launched Student Mentorship Program. It is a program that provides up to 140 students with valuable on-the-job experiences. This year, we are allocating \$339,000 to expand the program to include summer career development opportunities in the aquaculture, agriculture, technology, forestry, mining, community and oil and gas sectors.

Mr. Speaker, we believe we have put forward a budget that works for the people of this province. We are turning the corner towards a brighter future. The stage is set to continue creating jobs and opportunities for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and improving service delivery.

Mr. Speaker, we have maintained our commitment to bring this budget back into this hon. House and I look forward to debating its merits with all Members. The people of this province want our Legislature to work together to make Newfoundland and Labrador the best place to live, work and raise a family.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Minister of Finance to move ...

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. the Premier, that we adjourn debate.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The motion is that debate be adjourned.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

The motion is carried.

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

MR. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform the House that I have received a message from Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor.

MR. SPEAKER: All rise, please.

I have, in my hands, a message from the Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor. It's dated June 6, 2019.

As Lieutenant-Governor of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, I transmit Estimates of sums required for the Public Service of the Province for the year ending 31 March 2020, in the aggregate of \$7,576,549,700, and in accordance with the provisions of sections 54 and 90 of the *Constitution Act, 1867*, I recommend these Estimates to the House of Assembly.

Sgd.: _____
Lieutenant-Governor

Please be seated.

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

MR. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Premier, that the message, together with the Estimates, be referred to a Committee of Supply.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that the message from Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor, together with the Estimates, be referred to a Committee of Supply, and that I do now leave the Chair.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

The motion is carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Reid): Order, please!

We will now take a few moments to distribute the budgetary documents to all hon. Members.

(Budgetary documents are distributed.)

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

MR. SPEAKER (Trimper): The hon. the Deputy Speaker and the Chair of the Committee of Supply.

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

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

When shall the report be received?

MR. A. PARSONS: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the Committee have leave to sit again?

MR. A. PARSONS: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

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

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

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

And as you note, I already moved Motion 7 earlier to establish the committees. At this point I would give notice and, by leave, move, firstly, that the following heads of expenditure be referred to the Government Services Committee: Consolidated Fund Services; Executive Council; Department of Finance; Public Procurement

Agency; Public Service Commission; Service Newfoundland and Labrador; and the Department of Transportation and Works.

Number two, that the following heads of expenditure be referred to the Resource Committee: the Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour; the Department of Fisheries and Land Resources; the Department of Natural Resources; and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation.

And three, that the following heads of expenditure be referred to the Social Services Committee: the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development; the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development; the Department of Health and Community Services; the Department of Justice and Public Safety; the Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment; and the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also wish to advise Members that today, June 11, 2019, at 6 p.m., the Social Services Committee will meet in the Chamber to review the Estimates for Justice and Public Safety.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: And the hon. Member has leave, yes?

AN HON. MEMBER: Leave.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: All those against?

The motion is carried.

Thank you.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, at this time I would again go back to Orders of the Day and Motion 2.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's an honour to represent the people of Stephenville - Port au Port in the House of Assembly. I want to thank the people for electing me and entrusting me to serve on their behalf. Across the great District of Stephenville - Port au Port in the House of Assembly. I want to thank the people for electing me and entrusting me to serve on their behalf.

Across the great District of Stephenville - Port au Port, there are communities rich in culture with people who work hard and are fiercely proud to live in the region. Our region holds so much potential but there are important issues that need to be addressed. Our health care services need to be improved. Our aging infrastructure must be replaced. We need innovative ways to better utilize our airport and seaport. We can become a hub where businesses can grow and prosper with opportunities for year-round tourism.

We must support our historic Indigenous population and our historic French culture. We must ensure the sustainability of our farming community. We need joint management of our fishery and allocation of resources based on principles of adjacency and fairness. We need to grow our economy so that our young people can find opportunities at home. And we must always look for ways to support our seniors.

My focus is to ensure that the District of Stephenville - Port au Port realizes its full potential. What's good for the District of Stephenville - Port au Port is good for the province, and what's good for the province is good for the District of Stephenville - Port au Port. I look forward to working hard to realize this vision.

I am proud to be part of this caucus with so many talented individuals from all across this

great province. As a former coach and player, I know the importance of teamwork in achieving results. Our caucus team will work hard to ensure that we get the results that the people of this province deserve.

It's also an honour to have been appointed Finance critic for the Official Opposition, and to have the opportunity to begin the response to this year's budget.

Before I get into the budget debate, I would like to make a couple of acknowledgements. First, to the Speaker: Mr. Speaker, you have taken on the role as Chair of the Speakers of Canada Association. All Speakers in the country are represented, including the House of Commons and the Senate, the three Territories and 10 provinces.

I would like for all of us to acknowledge and wish you luck on chairing this Committee.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. WAKEHAM: I would also, as one of the newbies in the House of Assembly, like to acknowledge the Minister of Finance, who has the most service of anyone sitting in this House today. The Minister of Finance was first elected in 1996; and, as I said, is the longest serving MHA in the House of Assembly today.

Congratulations on the work you do for the people.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. WAKEHAM: But, Mr. Speaker, that doesn't mean I will go easy on him as Finance critic.

For me and many of my colleagues, the budget debate will be our first opportunity to speak in the House. It's a big thing for anyone to stand up in the House and speak. I hope that none of us lose sight of the importance of what we are doing.

We are the elected representatives of the people of Newfoundland. This is their House. This is where the people's democratic rights are carried

out. They elect us to stand here on their behalf and speak for them. That's why we never refer to one another here by our given names – because we are here, not as individuals, but as the voices of all the people of our respective districts. They speak through us, and we act for them.

Great sacrifices were made to establish the democratic rights we enjoy. We just marked D-Day, when people died to fight a system that threatened to impose tyranny on democracies like ours.

It's important to do our jobs well, so people see the value of this House and the system that supports it. If we are sometimes animated and vigorous in expressing our views, it's because they matter so much. We look to the Speaker to rein us in if we become too animated from time to time, but we won't be pulling our punches on things that really matter to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, the government had two options with respect to the budget. One, they could reintroduce the budget that was introduced back in April but never debated or passed. Or two, it could have introduced a revised budget to address some of the concerns and constructive solutions raised during the election campaign.

The government opted for the first of these approaches – to bring back the same budget as before, without changes. We think they should have chosen the other option. The result of the election is that the people of this province mandated a different set of priorities from those embodied in the unpassed budget.

This is not the best budget for 2019.

Last week, our leader wrote to the Premier to ask for a new approach, and delay the budget until later in the year to get it right. Here's what he asked for:

Dear Premier,

In the spirit of collaboration, I write to urge the government not to reintroduce the 2019 budget that was introduced by the Finance Minister on April 16, but to introduce a revised budget to address some of the concerns and constructive

solutions raised during the election campaign. In light of all that was said during the campaign and the plurality the people have delivered, I do not believe the status quo is an acceptable option.

If the budget is not changed, the tax burden on people will be too high; the level of public expenditure will be too high, and certain vital services that ought to be covered will be neglected.

In our 2019 policy Blue Book, we presented a very reasonable alternative that I urge you and your colleagues to consider. The document remains available in its entirety online and bears close scrutiny by your officials.

There are eight things in particular that I believe you should consider: eliminate the levy as early as possible. Your government's own independent tax review committee said the levy is regressive, poor tax policy that should be ended prior to the legislated date.

Eliminate the sales tax on homeowner insurance, along with the sales tax on auto insurance. The money people save on insurance tax and the levy will be reinvested in the local economy, generating economic activity, jobs and revenue.

Introduce an affordable child care program along the lines of the program I proposed to cap the cost at \$25 per child per day for a family with a gross family income of \$150,000 or less; progressively less than that for families earning less than \$65,000; and zero cost for families earning less than \$32,500.

The NDP also proposed a \$25-a-day child care program in their policy document. Such a policy will not only create new jobs in child care while allowing many parents, particularly moms, to enter the workforce, but also leave money in the people's pockets that they can spend in the local economy, further driving growth.

Change the medical transportation system to allow 100 per cent reimbursement of travel for people who have to travel for medical reasons outside their region, so every patient, no matter where they live, receives timely and affordable care. Improved access to care yields long-term benefits.

Remove the age cap to ensure Medicare covers the cost of insulin pumps for all persons with Type 1 diabetes, not just current users of insulin pumps. This investment in access to care will produce a long-term benefit for people and savings for the province.

Begin to develop a community residential hospice, end-of-life care model by working with the proponents of the Lionel Kelland Hospice in Grand Falls-Windsor in their efforts to establish a hospice, and let this be a model for others throughout the province. You promised this during the election campaign, and should move on it in 2019.

Develop a new policy on school busing within 1.6 kilometres of school. In your policy document four years ago, you promised to act on this. People are not satisfied with the changes implemented. You must do better. We heard this at the doorways across the province. It is a priority that must be addressed in 2019. We cannot put a price on the safety of children.

Increase the budget of ArtsNL to \$5 million over the next three years. You committed to an increase of \$1 million in the first year, but additional increases are warranted for the following two years to achieve the \$5 million target. I believe all parties committed to this during the course of the campaign.

If time is required to act on these suggestions, then let's take the time to get things right. Our plan was to take the additional time required to produce a revised budget, and to bring forward an additional Interim Supply bill in the meantime.

I also urge you to press the Trudeau government even harder to make transfer programs fairer. Health and social transfers should be based on need, not population, and the equalization rules must be adjusted to be fair and responsive to our province. In fact, I call for a joint federal-provincial recovery plan to address our profound loss of population and the threat it represents to our survival.

We can make a concerted case for such a plan under section 36 of the Constitution. Treated fairly, we would be in the fiscal position that provinces like Quebec and Nova Scotia are in as

they achieve fiscal balances and cut taxes while improving services, all the while, receiving federal transfers denied to us. I would be pleased to discuss these suggestions further with you, the Finance Minister and officials.

The Premier wrote back to us and here's what he said: Thank you for your letter dated June 5, 2019, which my office received late yesterday afternoon, and for stating your priorities. Your letter focuses on three areas: one, level of taxation; two, level of public expenditure; and three, certain vital services.

The eight initiatives you mentioned in your letter are all areas that we would like to or are currently moving forward on. As you know, the levy will be eliminated this year and we have made commitments to the Lionel Kelland Hospice and increased ArtsNL funding.

However, as you have acknowledged in the past, the province is still in a very difficult fiscal position. Early in our first mandate, our government charted a seven-year course to return the province to a surplus position and a stronger economic footing. That plan is working and we continue to be on track to reach this goal in 2022-23.

None of the eight initiatives you referenced in your letter address your concern over the high level of public expenditures in our province. In fact, it appears that you have proposed cutting revenue while, at the same time, increasing expenditures, which would increase the deficit and provincial debt.

In the true spirit of collaboration, and as we move forward while making our province the best possible place to live and raise a family, I ask that you provide further details on how much additional public expenditure you believe is required to address the initiatives you have suggested, as well as where there additional expenditures will be sourced, given that you have also proposed immediately reducing revenue the province receives. I also ask that you identify the areas you propose to cut to address public expenditures that you say are too high. I look forward to these additional details.

We replied to the Premier's response by saying the following: Thank you for your June 6

response to by June 5 letter about the 2019 budget. To be clear, I did not suggest that you take the budget you presented in April and simply add new expenditures while reducing certain revenues. The result of the election is that the electorate mandated a different set of priorities from those embodied in the unpassed budget. I clearly indicated that time and effort would be required to incorporate my suggestions in a revised budget, essentially going back to the drawing board.

You asked how we would do things differently. We are offering to help you reorganize priorities to address the issues that people raised during the election campaign – issues such as the urgency of making life more affordable for people and employers. That's how it would be done: By reorganizing priorities so they better reflect the needs of the people and the province. We would be willing to sit down with the government to do this work.

Obviously, it's not something that could be done in the few hours available between now and Tuesday. This is why I offered the solution of approving further Interim Supply now and developing a re-prioritized budget for introduction later in the year. If you were to choose to take this course of action, we would join you over the summer months to get the work done, and a better budget ready for later in the year.

I do remind you again that our proposal to eliminate the levy right away mirrors the advice of your own Independent Tax Review Committee; our proposal for school busing reform mirrors your 2015 commitment; our proposals on the hospice and ArtsNL funding mirror your own election commitments; our proposal on insulin pump coverage will actually reduce costs in the long run; our proposal on medical transportation will improve access and efficiency, reduce missed appointments and improve people's health; and our proposals for insurance tax and child care will drive economic growth and revenue growth. Let's take the time to get the budget priorities right.

Those were the letters. In terms of the levy, we believe it is doing more harm than good, and moving early will actually help the province's economy and budgetary situation. Again, it's not

just saying this. The Independent Tax Review Committee, in a quote from page 13, said: The temporary reduction levy “was introduced in Budget 2016 as a measure to generate additional revenue to address the very large deficit. The measure was modelled after the Ontario Health Premium and can be described better as a ‘head tax’ than a pure income tax or surtax. Further, on a proportionate basis the TDRL impacts middle income earners greater than higher or lower earners—it is generally a regressive tax measure.”

Earlier today, we were informed that the levy will not come off until December of 2019 which, as I said, means that every taxpayer in this province that paid the levy last year will pay that levy again in 2019. The minister said that’s something like \$55 million that will stay in the pockets of government instead of being returned to the pockets of the taxpayers.

So, new approach – we were doing our job of offering concrete solutions for a new approach, and we were citing experts such as those on the government’s own Independent Tax Review Committee to back up our solutions. The Premier chose not to take us up on our offer. We believe the people of the province clearly spoke during the election campaign about their dissatisfaction with the high level of taxes and the unaffordability of certain services.

We believe the people voted for change, not the status quo. But what we have before us now to debate as a budget is a status quo. We offered to collaborate in ways that are unusual and unprecedented in this province. When the House is divided such that the government has only a plurality rather than a clear majority, that’s a signal that people in their collective wisdom have asked us to work together. The government no longer has carte blanche – a blank cheque – to govern as it pleases. The reigns have been tightened. The proper response to this new reality is to do things differently.

Our Leader has made it clear, on behalf of our caucus, that we have no intention right now of trying to bring down this government on a matter of confidence, such as the budget, and send the province into political turmoil and perhaps a new election. The people have spoken their will and given us a mandate to find a way

to make things work. If the government is not prepared to send this budget back to the drawing board with the Opposition parties around the table, then we have an alternate suggestion, which I will make right now.

And that is to begin immediately to consult with us on budget 2020. Don’t wait until early 2020 to ask for our suggestions. Bring us around the table now and let’s take the months between now and March 2020 to bring all the information and options to the table and hammer out a 2020 budget that works better for our province. Bring us to the table and let’s truly collaborate for once. Let’s show the country a new way of doing things and produce a budget that we all stand and say it’s the best budget for our province in 2020.

Here’s why it’s so important to take a new approach and not simply say everything is hunky-dory on the way forward. We heard during the election campaign that things are not hunky-dory in our neighbourhoods of our province. But even if we didn’t have the evidence directly from the people, we also have it in the government’s own budgetary documents.

The Economy document shows that some things are going well but, by in large, our province is not growing as it should. Other economies in our country are steaming ahead. Ours is falling apart. And here’s some of the information from the government’s own *Economy 2019* document. In 2018 – and I quote – real GDP declined by an estimated 2.9 per cent. Real exports decreased by 2.6 per cent. The population as of July 1, 2018 was down 0.6 per cent compared to the previous year. The value of retail sales decreased by 2.4 per cent. The number of new vehicles sold was 30,266, down from 33,251 in 2017. Consumer prices rose by 1.6 per cent. There were 1,096 housing starts in the province, a decline of 21.7 per cent from 2017.

The number of residential properties sold in the province through MLS declined by 5.1 per cent to 3,730 units, while the average price declined by 1.3 per cent. Non-resident visitors to the province decreased by 3.5 per cent to 533,500. Associated expenditures were \$569.7 million, down 1 per cent from 2017. Again, these are not

my numbers; these are the numbers in *The Economy* book.

Projected for 2019: Consumer prices are forecast to increase by 1.5 per cent. The province's population is projected to decline 0.2 per cent. Mineral exploration expenditures are expected to decline to about \$39 million from \$45.4 million in 2018. The government's long-range projections for 2020 show additional decline.

Again, from *The Economy* 2019: Real household income is projected to decline by 1.4 per cent. Real disposable income is projected to decline by 1.3 per cent. Retail sales are projected to decline by 0.2 per cent. Real capital investment is projected to decline by 19.7 per cent. Housing starts are projected to decline by 5.1 per cent. Employment is projected to decline by 1.3 per cent.

The size of the labour force is projected to decline by 0.8 per cent. And the population is projected to decline by a further 0.1 per cent. In fact, the government's *Economy* document projects that the province's population will fall in 2019 and again in 2020, and again in 2021 and again in 2022.

Let's look at the latest employment numbers. The most recent Labour Force Survey was published by Statistics Canada on Friday, June 7. Here's what they reported: Employment in Newfoundland and Labrador was down 2,700, driven by losses in part-time work. The unemployment rate rose by 0.7 percentage points to 12.4 per cent. After trending downward in the second half of 2018, the unemployment rate in this province has been relatively flat since the beginning of 2019. Year over year, employment saw little change.

For a province that needs jobs and growth, that's not good news. That's not an indication that we are on the right track and everything is going well. It's another wake-up call. Compare that to the performance of the country as a whole. The rest of the country is growing, with an unemployment rate that is less than half our rate. Employment rose in Ontario, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick. At the same time, it fell in Newfoundland and Labrador and Prince Edward Island, while it was little changed in the remaining provinces.

When they are growing, why are we in a tailspin of decline? Is it because we lack opportunities, resources or skilled people who want to work? No. Could our relative decline be the result of this government's policies in favour of high taxes?

The government has been saying for years that it is on the right track. It continues to say this, even after the election. This message stands in stark contrast with the messages that all of us heard on the doorsteps of the province during the election campaign. Everything is not okay. The status quo is not okay. The same old approach is not okay. There's a desperate need for jobs and hope, and a new approach that produces them.

Let's look at the bankruptcy statistics. In February 2019 there were 119 consumer bankruptcies, compared to 83 in February 2018. There were five businesses bankrupt in February 2019 compared to one in February 2018. In just the first quarter of 2019, 10 businesses went bankrupt, compared to 20 in the whole of 2018.

There is new information this week on insolvencies; I mentioned it earlier. Here's a story VOXM reported. Consumer insolvencies in Newfoundland and Labrador have jumped dramatically in the last year. That's according to Credit Canada, a not-for-profit group which recently released a new poll showing almost four in 10 Atlantic Canadians feel the topic of personal debt and bankruptcy is taboo.

Credit Canada's CEO Laurie Campbell says insolvencies in this province are up 52 per cent over the same period last year. She says that tells them that people are struggling and, with interest rates rising, the highest numbers are in this province. Something is very wrong with this picture. It's not the way forward. It's the way downward.

The loss of people is a critical problem. By 2025, with current trends, 27 per cent of Newfoundland and Labrador's population will be over the age 65. And while the baby boomers will be living longer, they will retire. Retirements will increase, and the workforce will shrink. The unemployment rate will continue to fall, but the tax base will also shrink.

The province's economic health will be influenced by the fact that fewer of our citizens will be paying taxes, but they will be drawing more and more on our health care services. Less tax dollars, less services, greater debt and increasing difficulty funding services all mean that there will not be enough new workers to replace those about to leave the workforce in greater numbers.

How serious is this challenge? There will be 58,900 more 65-year-olds living in the province in 2030 than there were in 2015. That's a 61 per cent increase. And by 2036, if we do nothing, the Population Project at Memorial University forecasts that our population could fall to under 470,000 people, which will not be enough of a workforce to sustain services at current levels.

Simply put, our province must replace and expand our taxpaying workforce. We need more people paying less tax. Our province needs more people if we want our economy to grow and not stagnate. This can only happen in two ways: Either more people can be born here – which, given our aging population, is increasingly unlikely – or, as a province, we can take aggressive steps to encourage the return migration of provincial expatriates and we can work to stimulate and facilitate the arrival of new people to the province.

How many do we need? Recently, we were told that the province welcomed 1,170 newcomers and that in 2018, the province welcomed 1,525 newcomers. But these efforts fall short of the government's target of 1,700 newcomers annually, and they fall well short of the 3,800 newcomers needed annually to stop the decline and ensure growth. Unless our province's population growth targets are doubled, the province's population and economic decline will accelerate.

In order to take advantage of the benefits to our economy and communities of an increased population, Newfoundland and Labrador needs to increase its population to the average of 1 per cent each year, or more than 5,000 people per year.

At present, our province has the lowest percentage of population foreign born, only 2.4

per cent, compared to the Canadian average of 24 per cent. This needs to change.

Depopulation affects every aspect of our social, fiscal and economic well-being. Because federal health and social transfer programs are now based on an equal per capita cash basis, the annual financial loss from this decrease in population is in the order of \$80 million. This financial loss of \$80 million annually does not include the impact on federal equalization payments.

Section 36(1) of the Constitution commits the Government of Canada to furthering economic development to reduce disparity in opportunities. Ottawa is neglecting this obligation. Disparity is widening as our population declines. Federal policies are making the problem worse. Federal transfers are being awarded on a per capita basis rather than a needs basis.

Ironically, Newfoundland and Labrador's declining population makes its per capita situation look healthier than it is. Under a per capita formula, the more people we lose, the wealthier we seem to be. The weaker we get, the stronger we appear. This is ridiculous.

We can yet address our population, debt and fiscal unfairness challenges through committed government action; however, committed government action will require champions both at home and elsewhere in the country. The development of champions requires leaders to share their vision with opinion leaders elsewhere in Canada and with the public at home, and explain why the cause is not only just, but in the national best interest.

What is the purpose of a budget? What is the purpose of a government? It's not just to nickel-and-dime our way to a paper surplus. This year's budget has a monstrous paper surplus, but it's not real. It's not tangible. It hides a monstrous deficit. The purpose of a government and its budget should be to maximize opportunities for people so we will all grow, because growth is required to finance the social programs that our most vulnerable people – and, indeed, all of us one day – will rely on.

We've got to get this province's population growing, and that means getting our economy and business opportunities and employment opportunities growing. That's why we're here. Anything else is just fiddling with numbers. Unless we get a passion in our hearts and a clear plan in our heads to grow our economy, then the decline that our own documents project will come to pass. And that decline is not just statistics. It's young people leaving. It's families leaving. It's communities dying. It's the future slipping away, and that's not okay.

The irony in all of this is that we're a province rich in opportunities to build on. We ought to be one of the leaders in population growth and job growth in our country. The \$1 million McKinsey report that the government released at budget time highlighted many of these opportunities; but, sadly, the McKinsey report was an indictment of everything this government has been doing wrong.

McKinsey said we should be seizing opportunities in ocean technology. The government let our ocean technology leadership slip away to Halifax. McKinsey said we should be seizing opportunities in aviation. This government let our edge in aviation slip away to Halifax. You cannot read the McKinsey report without thinking what we are capable of being as a province. You cannot help but wonder what things would be like here if we were firing on all cylinders.

Let's talk about other squandered opportunities. The Atlantic Accord agreement in 2005 gave us the opportunity in 2019 to get additional offsets and to negotiate equalization reform and transfer reform with the Government of Canada, one on one. We know we didn't get it.

Instead, we got locked into a 38-year contract without an escalator clause that gives us a paper surplus this year, but will force future generations of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to pay enormous sums of money back to Ottawa. This is not a good deal for Newfoundland and Labrador. It is a missed opportunity. Meanwhile, over that same time period, how much will other provinces receive in equalization that is denied to us?

The Premier promised to fight for equalization reform in 2018 and 2019. The Finance Minister did the same, but the Trudeau Liberals rolled over this province by renewing the same old formula that leaves us high and dry while other provinces get billions of dollars a year to run surpluses, cut taxes and improve services like subsidized child care that we can only dream of. That's not fair. That's what happens when you fail to fight, you get shortchanged. Our people get shortchanged.

Instead of getting fairness through transfer reform, our people are coping with excessive taxation, inferior services, growing debt and so-called Accord money that our children are going to have to pay back. We might fight harder. Fight harder, Premier. Fight harder, Finance Minister. Tell the Trudeau Liberals that Newfoundland and Labrador is in decline when we have everything we need to be growing – everything except a fair opportunity to put our strengths to work for us.

This failure to fight makes us wonder how the province is expecting to get the \$200 million in federal funding it announced for rate mitigation before it had an agreement with Ottawa to provide that funding. So far, the administration has had a terrible record of delivering what it's led people to believe it was going to get from Ottawa.

While Newfoundland and Labrador is considered to be a have province under the current rules, getting zero equalization or offset payments, Quebec is considered to be a have-not province, getting approximately \$13 billion in equalization this year, while running a surplus, cutting taxes and subsidizing daycare.

This imbalance is on track to widen. The Parliamentary Budget Officer's Fiscal Sustainability Report 2017 stated: "In our projections, Quebec's share of the total federal Equalization envelope increases from 60 per cent in 2017 to 75 per cent in 2091."

That report also stated: Equalization payments help explain part of these long-term trends in transfer revenue, because equalization is determined according to each province's fiscal capacity relative to the Canadian average. Widening fiscal disparities across provinces

necessitate larger transfers to provinces with lower-than-average per capita incomes, such as Quebec, New Brunswick and British Columbia.

Consequently, these provinces will see increases in equalization payments relative to their GDP over the long term. In contrast, provinces with relatively higher per capita income growth will see decreases in equalization payments relative to their GDP.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer published another report on March 20, 2018, examining some scenarios for reforming equalization. Under two of those scenarios Newfoundland and Labrador would have benefited significantly to the tune of 1.7 per cent of GDP – some-\$500 million or more a year.

One professor was quoted in a *Telegram* story on April 26 stating that, if we were to exclude offshore resource revenues and recalculate equalization based on non-resource revenues, then we would be receiving about \$316 million in 2019.

Imagine what we could do with that. Imagine if Canada Health Transfers and Canada Social Transfers were allocations on a needs basis rather than on the basis of population while ours is falling. Imagine if we didn't have to bear a carbon tax.

Our province is tiny and growing tinier in terms of population, so we have to punch above our weight to get what we need. No other province is going to do that punching for us; and, obviously, we can't count on the Government of Canada to do the right thing. So where does that leave us? It leaves us with an obligation to fight harder and forge alliances, and get creative in trying to get our economy growing. In this new term, we have the opportunity to start doing that.

Let's try new things. Our plan includes such things as demanding Ottawa work with us on a joint federal/provincial recovery plan pursuant to Section 36 of the Constitution and conducting a referendum on fairness of equalization to spur Ottawa to come to the table to talk reform. These ideas are outside the box, but that's where our thinking has to be, if we're going to arrest the decline we see around us.

The Premier wants to tell us the only pieces of the puzzle are expenditures, revenues and debt and that if we raise spending and cut taxes, then we'll have to borrow. He's forgetting the other pieces of the puzzle. We need to get a fair share of transfers and get our economy growing if we are to address our fiscal situation with more than the pieces of the puzzle that are currently on the table.

Those pieces are fundamental. To be honest, we are not calling for growth in spending, we are calling for reprioritization. It is the government opposite that has failed to get spending properly under control. That's not my conclusion. That's the conclusion of successive Auditors General, economic leaders in the board of trade and our bond-rating agencies such as Moody's.

As I mentioned earlier, one of the province's bond-rating agencies, DBRS, published a post-budget analysis saying the Liberals did not actually achieve the \$1.9 billion surplus they announced in their 2019 budget. DBRS stated: After excluding the impact of the one-time revenue and incorporating capital spending as incurred rather than as amortized, this translates into a DBRS-adjusted deficit of \$855 million, or 2.4 per cent of GDP.

The Liberals have talked of eventually getting back to balance, but the Auditor General expressed skepticism about that in her 2018 report, saying: "The Province's fiscal outlook for 2019 to 2023 is subject to considerable risks"

Expenses for 2017-18 totalled \$8.2 billion – a \$74.4 million increase over the original budget. The audited financial statements also show that the Liberals did not achieve the deficit reduction targets they set for themselves in 2016. In 2017-18, they failed to reach their deficit reduction target, missing the mark by \$110 million.

Let's listen to quotes from our Auditors General. Former Auditor General Terry Paddon – quote – "While, on a per capita basis, Newfoundland and Labrador generates more revenue than every other province, per capita spending in this Province is substantially higher than per capita revenues and we spend more than every other province by a considerable margin."

“Newfoundland and Labrador spends in excess of 21% more per capita than the next highest province - Saskatchewan.”

From the current Auditor General, Julia Mullaley: “Newfoundland and Labrador’s deficit as a percentage of GDP for 2017-18 is 2.8%, the highest in Canada.”

“The Province’s Net Debt as a percentage of GDP has fluctuated over the last ten years - from a low of 23.4% in 2012 to a high of 44.5% at March 31, 2018 and is now significantly higher than the average of 30.0% of all other provinces.”

“Between 2018-19 to 2022-23, the Province expects, on average, to allocate 13.8% of every dollar of revenue generated to debt expenses. Money allocated to servicing debt is money that is not available to fund programs and services.”

“The Province of Newfoundland and Labrador generates more revenue, on a per capita basis, than every other province. Newfoundland and Labrador also has one of the highest tax burdens on a per capita basis in the country. However, per capita spending in this Province is substantially higher than per capita spending in every other province and is also higher than the Province’s per capita revenues. This suggests that revenue is not the primary issue creating the deficits but the level of spending. Continued emphasis on sustainably reducing the Province’s per capita spending will remain important.”

Let me be clear that the public service of our province didn’t create the fiscal challenge the government is facing. They didn’t create the problem, and the problem should not be solved on their backs. Massive layoffs in the public service would devastate our province and make things far worse. Instead of frightening the people on the front lines, start listening to them. They have plenty of ideas for doing things differently. They would like to be consulted long before the usual pre-budget consultation sessions get underway in this spring. Let’s start the consulting right now and really start listening to those who know.

Let me conclude by stating that we think government has to do better. People are demanding a new approach. We believe it will

make a big difference. The call to collaborate is not coming from us alone; it is coming from the people. A plurality is a public demand for collaboration. We will support the government for as long as they provide good government, and no longer. If the people do not like the way this government is heading, they can call on Opposition Members to pull the plug on their behalf.

We have no interest in orchestrating a non-confidence vote for political expediency. We are under the same expectation as the government opposite to collaborate and to make things work. But the people have put you on notice that if you fail to deliver what the people expect of you, then the people will call on us to pull the plug. The people have put you on notice, and they’re watching.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further speakers?

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I’m happy to speak to *Budget 2019* here today. This is a prime opportunity to talk about, I think, in my opinion, one of the things that was referenced in one of the earlier Ministerial Statements is Public Service Week.

So, tonight, I get to kick off the Estimates of this year’s budget by doing the Justice Estimates. It’s a chance for me, I guess, in roughly an hour and a half, the Justice Department and myself will be sitting down in this House answering questions from my colleagues across the way.

I want to give them a shout-out because, in many cases, when you think about this, it’s almost like the iceberg. There’s what you see, which is the budget document that we all get to debate here and go through, but when you look at the work that goes into these documents – and I just speak from my own departmental point of view. I know about the hours and days and weeks that people of the Justice Department have put into that particular component of this budget.

I want to thank them for the time they have put into it, and I look forward to doing the Estimates tonight where we get a chance to speak to the Justice Department's planning and priorities going forward.

Any chance I get to stand up in this House and speak about the Justice Department is certainly a pleasurable and a favourable opportunity for me. This year, Justice, I think, was very well represented in *Budget 2019*. Perhaps the biggest component of this budget that people will notice is our announcement – and I want to thank my colleague in Transportation and Works for being with me down in Quidi Vidi, not too many weeks back, where we announced the upcoming replacement of Her Majesty's Penitentiary.

That was certainly a big day. It's something that's been talked about now – and it's no exaggeration to say that it's been talked about for decades. Certainly, it has, but I think this is the first real concrete step in moving forward and replacing the ancient facility down there, and it's one that needs to be done.

It will take some time. We're looking at a five-year plan. But I look at the progress that's been made when I look at construction of capital infrastructure, especially when we look at long-term care units and schools and looking at the plan that the department and their team has used in building those pieces of infrastructure, I have every confidence that this piece will work as well.

I think we managed to keep that something that was relatively quiet, and I know that there was certainly a significant amount of, not only optimistic and positive surprise, but it was very favourable received because – again, I would put this out there and I would pass that on to my colleagues on the other side, and certainly my colleagues on this side as well, I've had the experience and the benefit of being in Her Majesty's Penitentiary on a number of occasions, even before I was an elected official.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. A. PARSONS: Yeah. And it's funny, because I'm getting heckled from both sides, Mr. Speaker, on that comment.

The fact is, before I ever got into a position where we're making policy, I had an opportunity to go and visit the institution and talk to clients of mine that were there. So I've always had the background experience, and I know individuals in this room right now have had a chance to do that, but there are many who have never.

One of the issues we've had – when we talk about justice as a whole, one of the issues I think we have – and it's not a Newfoundland and Labrador issue. To me it's a Canadian issue, it's an American issue. This is an issue that's plagued much of the world, and it's a very – I like to call it, it's just a crime and punishment mentality, which is if you do the crime you simply should be locked up, serve it out and in the worst possible conditions ever. The fact is there are many times when we see that we've all, at some point, shared that. When you hear particular stories, incidents or crimes, we've all shared that.

What we've realized – and I think we've grown as a province a lot, especially in the past few years when we talk about, there are so many people inside that the fact is it really could happen to anybody. Crime doesn't look at demographic. Crime doesn't look at rural versus urban. It doesn't look at age. It doesn't look at whether you come from a high-earning family or a low-earning family.

In many cases, we're realizing some of the factors that are causing people to be there are things that could affect any single person in this House, any single person in our family, any single person in this province. I'm talking about mental health and addictions, when we talk about people with severe mental disease, when we talk about people that are facing just horrible addiction problems.

I talked to a Crown prosecutor once, and she's now a judge up in Labrador, Judge Kari Ann Pike. She was a Crown prosecutor for 20 years. So this is a person whose job is to go in, lay out the facts of the case, and in many cases the result is incarceration.

She's talking about a young person in an area once whose crime that day was they stole six cans from a dollar store of the spray that you use to clean the computer. They weren't stealing it

to use on a computer, they were stealing it to get high. You can't tell me somebody that's stealing six cans of that is someone that wants to be there, that wants to be doing that. That's someone that can't help it. That's someone that is dragged down into that terrible cycle that is drug addiction. And we've seen it.

I'm sure everybody in this House could share those stories, but when we – the fact that we seem to forget sometimes is a vast majority of our populations in prisons across this country are people of similar circumstances. So we can take the approach that was thought of centuries and centuries ago when we talk about the punishment aspect. When you look at the term Her Majesty's Penitentiary, where does penitentiary come from? It comes from the word penitent. We have to be penitent. We have to serve that time to be forgiven. That's another thing we'll get into some other day when we talk about the naming of this new facility. Maybe penitentiary is not the best term, but I digress.

When we look at these individuals, where we put them into a system where they may already facing mental health issues, they may already be facing drug addiction issues, and the fact is when you have a facility that was built before Canada was a nation, you are not going to have somebody come out on the other end of that any better than they were. They're going to come out, in many cases, worse. What happens then? They're released back into our communities. They're released back as our neighbours, and in many cases they end up back doing the same things that caused them to go there in the first place. It's a cycle that can't be broken.

You only have to talk to one inmate that talk about getting out, going out into the street. It's like you're the deer in the headlights, you're out there all of a sudden. You've been living this structured lifestyle; getting up, being allowed to do this, being told when to do that, and all of a sudden you're on your own. In many cases you have no money. In many cases you have no family to go to. In many cases you have no place to lay your head.

I say to anyone of us, try taking away our car keys and our house keys and a bank card, and see how you fair out. See how you make out. Then throw in the fact that this person is already

stigmatized by being incarcerated, and throw in the fact that they're facing mental health issues. It's a tough challenge, and we have to find a way to fix that.

We have done numerous things within the Department of Justice to fix that. When we talk about the concept of restorative justice, when we talk about the work we're doing with the Department of Health, when we're trying to cut down the wait-list for people that are serving time to have access to mental health treatment, we have made numerous steps; but, it's hard when you still have that facility. That when you go in there, it doesn't matter if you're a guest or if you're an employee, it's hard to think about rehabilitation when you're in a facility like that.

That's why I was so excited for us, as a part of this budget – and you know what, I have to thank my colleagues all around, all on this side. This was something that was a long time coming, but we had that support. The support of the Premier, the support of the Minister of Finance, Health and all my colleagues. I can tell you it was interesting, because somebody actually said to me: well, this was announced before our budget, do you think this was an election ploy? I say, have you ever tried to get elected on the penitentiary? Because that's the reality, you don't.

I got more emails saying lock them up than I got saying: great move. But do you know what? Those mindsets change, they change over time. The fact is we know what we're doing is right. We have the experts, we have the professionals. The workers in that system are telling us we have to do better. And by allowing this facility, I think we have done better.

Again, right now when we talk about the services that we provide in the institution, when we talk about the treatment that we want to provide, when we talk about people going in to that facility, whether it is Spirit Horse or the – I'm trying to remember now – Canadian Mental Health Services. There are so many that go in there. There's a shortage of space. There's simply a shortage of space. You cannot bring any more in.

This new facility, this *Budget 2019* will allow for a facility that will allow us for greater access

to health care services, for mental health treatment and for drug addiction treatment for those people that are spending time at that institution. And that's why I was so proud to be a part of the team that can make this happen.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there were other justice issues within this budget that I was very proud to be a part of the team that worked on those. When we look at the money that's being expended at the Labrador Correctional Centre. We face significant challenges when we talk about, I won't say the justice system, but when we talk about the facets of the system and how we treat people; when we look at how we used to do segregation back in the past.

The reality is you cannot do these things today that we did, even just a decade ago. When we look at the Decades of Darkness review, let's put a person in a cell by themselves for 23 hours a day suffering from a mental health issue, suffering from an addictions issue and hope that they come out feeling better. You can't do that.

One of the issues we faced up in Labrador is we had people – because of just not enough capacity at the Labrador Correctional Centre. We have now announced a plan to fix that, and it will reduce the number of people that ended up serving significant periods of time being held in RCMP holding cells. RCMP holding cells are not meant for long-term storage of offenders. It's not. It's meant to hold somebody before they end up going to the next place, and we had that issue in Labrador.

In many cases, because of the lack of capacity at the Labrador Correctional Centre, we had many people having to be flown down here going to HMP, and that presented pretty significant challenges when we talk about our offenders from Labrador. Throw in the fact that we're already facing these challenges, and then throw in the fact that you're coming out away from your support base, away from your family that are visiting, away from people giving you those cultural supports. If you want to look at it just from the financial point of view, look at the significant cost by not having that capacity, by having to fly people down here with guards back and forth. That's a huge cost.

One of the things that we've had to talk to people about is people want to have a crime and punishment mentality. I say, well, that's fine. If you want to have that crime-and-punishment mentality, it's going to cost you. It costs about \$110,000 per year to house one inmate. So if you want to lock them up, that's fine but somebody has to pay for that. When you talk about having to lock somebody up far away from their base, and then provide those services and supports elsewhere, that makes it even more difficult.

So I was very proud of the move that's been made there. Again, with the support – the officials at Transportation and Works says that department handles all the infrastructure. When it comes to any infrastructure build or renovation that happens in this province, it falls under the leadership of the Minister of Transportation and Works. And, before his head gets too big, his deputy minister, who's also doing a wonderful job as well.

Mr. Speaker, we've made other announcements when it comes to the work that we've been doing in Justice and Public Safety. When we talk about bail supervision, when we talk about electronic monitoring, there's been significant steps taken that I think is in the upstream direction and the right direction when it comes to that.

Now, my time is running out. The reality is who knows if I get another opportunity to speak to this budget, so I want to speak to the main reason I'm here and the main reason that we're all here, and that's because of the constituents in the district that we live. But for the support of these constituents, we wouldn't get to talk about the departments that we're involved in. I want to talk about Burgeo - La Poile and talk about the support that they provided me, and talk about, again, why I think this budget will be helpful to the residents of Burgeo - La Poile.

I listened to the speech from the Finance critic, from the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port, and one point I took here – and I know his background – he talked about teamwork. That's something I think we all sort of recognize, when we talk about teamwork. The fact is that I get to stand up and talk about the good things happening in the district, but it's only because of

the teamwork. It's because of the teamwork that exists within departments, it's because of the teamwork that exists within our caucus and it's the teamwork that exists around whether it's the Cabinet table or the department tables.

One of the big things – I'm like many MHAs; I have a district that has housing issues. I got to tell you, I appreciate the work that's been done by the Minister Responsible for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. We're going to see an eight-unit affordable housing project being constructed in my hometown of Port aux Basques. That's something we haven't seen for a long time. The demand there is growing. We're like many we have an aging population. The fact that there's going to be an increase to affordable housing available to them, that's an extremely, extremely positive thing.

When we look at the different changes we've made – and again, I throw the bouquet to the Minister of Health. When we talk about the things that have been done in health care, when faced with significant challenges within that department, the fact is that I think the people are better off now than they had been.

Now, are we where we want to be? No, my God, we are not where we want to be, but I think that we are on the path to where we need to be. Are there things that can change? I certainly believe that, but I'd like to think that some of the steps we've taken have led us into a direction that I think will put us into a prosperous place down the road.

The thing that I think about most, and I'm sure again I come back to every Member of this House, I'm not so worried about my parents, because they're starting to get towards that end, I'm not worried about myself, but I'm worried about the five-year-old and the eight-year-old that are back in Port aux Basques right now. That's who I'm worried. Those are the people that are relying on the school that they're going to, they're relying on the services at different facilities, they're relying on the health care system and if we didn't take the steps we had, their future is not going to be as bright as the future that I had.

I got to tell you, some of this is tough. You sit here and it's been extremely tough. But I tell

you what, because of some of the changes that we've made, we have made that future brighter.

I do agree when I listen to our leader, when I listen to the Premier, when I listen to the Members on the other side, I know that going forward we all have that same vision. We may have times, in the cut and thrust of debate, where we have that partisan nature. We all have different opinions on things. Tomorrow we might have a difference of opinion on how Question Period should run, but I don't think there's a single difference between us in the fact that we all want a better future for every single person that lives in our district. I share that; I know all these Members do.

I know that this is going to be an opportunity – again, to paraphrase or to echo what our leader has said: We're going to have to work together, to be collaborative, to change how we've done things. That will take time, but we all know that it's necessary. At the same time I don't want to look at the work that has been done so tirelessly by my colleagues and friends and by people with departments and the work that was set out before. There's been good work done to put us on a path. I think that the path is right.

Can we work together on establishing where that path goes in the future? We have no choice but to. I will say that that doesn't discount the path that we have moved from, because I tell you what, it's a path that has been fought with hard work, it's a path that's been fought at times with struggle and hard choices, but one that leads to a path that will lead to that better future for that five-year-old and that eight-year-old that are home right now.

They don't know what their father does. They think I just get on a plane and go. But the fact is that I know that if we didn't do some of things here, and if we don't continue to make some of the tough choices that we have to make – the fact is every single one of us would love to go to our districts and say we'd like to do this, we'd like to do that. We all share that – neither one of us doesn't. Very few of us, philosophically, may disagree with wanting to provide and to give everything we can, but there are some stark realities that we face and that we're all aware of.

So, on that note, before I sit down and allow one of my colleagues on the other side an opportunity to speak to this budget I will say that, given it's my first chance, I welcome every single one of you, as well as our colleagues here. The fact is that we are part of a group now of 40 people that have been blessed with the pleasure and the privilege of serving our constituents. There's no doubt we're going to have fights along the way. There's no doubt that we're going to have disagreements, but I'd like to think that we're going to have more in terms of collegiality and allegiance because we all know that when – it's like the old cartoon where, morning, Ralph, and you clock in, and you go in and you really do the job on each other and, at the end of the day, you clock out and you go on. Every one of us walks out here, we all know the responsibility that we share and the work that we do and we're going to try to do that together.

On that note a lot of work, a lot of effort, a lot of sweat – I don't know if any blood – definitely some tears went into the product that's been put here by the Minister of Finance. I was proud to be a part of that. I will be proud to support that and I'll be proud to work with the Members of this side and that side of the House to work together for the future of Newfoundland and Labrador, and I'll be certainly supporting this budget.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

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

Again, it's indeed a pleasure to stand here today and represent the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis and also the beautiful people in the District of Cape St. Francis. I had the opportunity to visit a lot of people in the District of Cape St. Francis over our last election period, as did many of my colleagues on both sides of the House and all over the place. I have to say that the reception was great. The reception was unbelievable. People in Newfoundland and Labrador are concerned at what's happening in

our province. They want to see our province come and be the best that it possibly can be for everybody – for their children, for my grandchildren, for everybody that's around.

We're all hear – and I agree with when he's leaving, when he goes, I think he called himself Fred when he walks out the door. I can say that the Minister of Justice, over the last four years, I've applauded many of the initiatives that he's brought to this House, and some great initiatives.

We look in this province with the issue that we have with mental health. I'd say that in this House of Assembly that nobody is – one in every five people in this province is affected by mental health issues, either themselves or in their families. So, we've come a long way and I applaud government for it. It's a good thing that government has been doing over the last number of years for initiatives that we have, to make sure that people who have issues that we address them.

Now, Mr. Speaker, again, I'd like to welcome back all of my colleagues. We have some new colleagues here on both sides of the House, and in the Third Party here. I welcome you all back. Some interesting times will be ahead of us. It's a great place to get up and be able to express yourself.

I was moved today by the Member for Torngat, and that's what we're here for. The lady got up today and she expressed her opinion on what was needed in her district. Now, the Minister of Transportation and Works did answer some questions there, but you could see the passion; the passion that we all have for our people and the passion that we need to have for our people. That's why we're here. We're here to represent our districts.

Like I said, this is going to be an interesting time. I note that there are two brothers here in two opposite parties. I don't know how that's going to work out when they have probably Sunday dinner with their mother and stuff like that. We'll see how that goes.

Mr. Speaker, first of all, I just want to thank – I was going to do it at the end but I'll do it at the beginning. I really do have to thank the people of Cape St. Francis who put me here for my

fourth term. When I stand here in this province and stand in this House of Assembly, I tell all my new colleagues here, that it's such a privilege.

This is a privilege. It's a privilege we've been given by the people in our district. When you go and knock on doors, they can make choices of whatever it is, but when you go back and you get re-elected – hopefully, you all do get re-elected again – you'll hear it. You'll know you've made the right choices and you've done the right things.

So, listen, as much as we want to say who's our boss and everything else, our constituents are always our boss. Always remember who put you here and why you're here. You're here to represent the people in your district. You're here to represent people that need your help. You're here to represent people that are vulnerable in society, and they do need our help.

I always say that you can build schools, you can build roads, you can do massive things in your district, but it's those little things you do for individual people that will make you feel so good. I could tell stories over the last number of years where they're small, they may be grants of \$1,000. They may be fixing a roof for somebody. They may be getting a window in a person's house. They may be helping a person – and not that you can do anything – to get in a personal care home, or even sometimes when people are in dire straights, sometimes it even just the point of listening to them.

MR. PETTEN: Fix the potholes.

MR. K. PARSONS: You can fix the potholes. Those are the things – now, the Minister of Transportation and Works, I'd have a hard job with him getting to fix all the potholes, but he's not bad. I have to say, he's pretty good.

My point is to the new people and my point is to people in this House of Assembly, we're here to represent our constituents. So make sure that we do it and make sure that we all do it for the right reasons. I believe we're here for the right reasons.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this is going to be a different Assembly. Like I said, I've been on both sides of

the House. I've been here with four different leaders. Every time my signs had to be changed all the time because there was somebody else underneath them. So it was always a different name on my sign. I've seen four different leaders here with four different elections, but we're all here for the one reason.

I believe we can work together. I want to see, and I think everybody in this House of Assembly wants to see, and I believe the people in Newfoundland and Labrador want to see us work together. They want to see us work, collaborate, have ideas. There's nothing wrong with being around a table and listening to somebody else's opinion. There's nothing wrong with being around a table and having an opinion yourself and letting people listen to it.

We all come from different constituencies. We all got rural – we got the St. John's area, we got the Corner Brook area. My area, even when I went to school, it was only at Gonzaga 16 kilometres away, but we were always considered baymen – and we were that close to St. John's. So I still consider myself a bayman really.

AN HON. MEMBER: Yeah, you are.

MR. K. PARSONS: And so I am. I am, but that's not a bad thing now. That's not a bad thing either.

I think that we – this session of the House of Assembly, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are going to look at us and want us to perform and act the way we should. So I really want to see – I'm going to make a few points now on the budget and I got to say, the Finance critic today for us did a fantastic job. He did a great job on the budget today.

The budget has to work for everybody, and going around – I'm going to just bring up a couple of little topics of what I heard at the doors, while I was knocking on doors. I, myself, am a type 2 diabetic; not type 1 but a type 2. So I don't require an insulin pump or anything else, but I met a lot of people that do, and I met a lot of young people that do.

I met this young gentleman who told me he's 32 years old and in a couple of years he's going to have to pay \$7,000 for an insulin pump, but the

coverage right now under this budget will not cover him because it's for people that are coming in. He's already pass the age where he can do – so the new person coming in will be covered but he won't be covered.

Then we talked about people with type 2 diabetes, that sometimes for some reasons, other than – might have an insulin pump but have needles and they don't take them on a regular basis. We had I think in our – was it three or four young doctors come to our caucus and talk to us about the –

AN HON. MEMBER: Four.

MR. K. PARSONS: Four young doctors come to our – these are students. They were in their second or third year. I believe they met with all caucuses, actually. They came to our caucus and explained to us the importance for everybody to have that coverage.

The Minister of Finance, I know we're always looking for savings, and when they did their presentation to us, the presentation was simple. This is going to cost – I don't know, I'm just going to give a figure, probably \$1.3 or \$1.4 million to get the – I'm not sure what it is, it could be a little bit higher. But what they explained to us was the savings down the road are going be five or six, or even 10 times that.

Those are the things we have to look at when we're doing our budget. If we can put in insulin pumps and everybody can be regulated on a regular basis, there would be less amputations, less strokes, less things that are major causes with blindness and stuff like that. That cost to our health care system is unbelievable. So preventative maintenance is what I call it.

If we can do something that can prevent the cost of these major – which will be, like, unbelievable costs down the road. If we can do anything to make sure we have those costs reduced in the future, that's a savings. That's a savings to our budget. It's a savings for future generations, and that's something we should be looking at.

I really believe, and I applaud our Leader for putting it in, that's something we'd like to see. We want to see the coverage. I think that's

something the majority of people in Newfoundland and Labrador, when you look at it, will look at it and say, yes, that's something that should be in the budget.

Now, I congratulate the new Minister of Education, a good friend. I have to congratulate him in his new – but today when we talked about the 1.6 kilometres, it's something else that I heard at the doors while I was knocking on doors in my district. Mr. Speaker, you've heard me get up many times and do many petitions on the 1.6 kilometres.

I live in a district where there's a lot of traffic. It's a small district. It's only 25 kilometres from one end to the other. There are people here who probably have 500 kilometres from one end to the other in their district, but there's a lot of traffic that travel along these roads.

Torbay, in particular, is where my major concern is. There are 17,000 cars a day that travel along Torbay Road. I knocked on all the doors on Torbay Road. Every young family that I spoke to on Torbay Road, next to the beautiful new school that we built, beautiful school, Juniper Ridge. Our education system down my way – listen, through this government, that government and governments past, we have a great education system with great schools that are built, but safety of those children was paramount among all the people who have children alone those roads.

We have no sidewalks. I said to the minister, and I will say to the minister again when I get another chance to do a petition on the 1.6, it's something that we need to look at. I know there's a cost. I don't think the cost will be that high. I'm willing to say – just my own perspective – that perhaps we can do it from K to six. Maybe we can do it where safety is an issue. I look at places on the Northeast Avalon that I know have huge growth and other places around the province in rural Newfoundland where the bus may go by and there's no cost to picking up the extra few kids along the way. Down my way, I assume that it would cost probably three more additional buses. But I believe that, through budget, safety is an issue, and that's something we should be looking at. So, Mr. Speaker, that's one thing that I know that our leader asked for.

I go back to the 2016 budget. Everybody knows and everybody's after hearing about the situation we were in – financial straits were really, really bad at the time. But even back then I didn't believe in taxing individuals. I believed that the levy was the wrong thing to do at that time, and I still believe today that it's the wrong thing to do. I believe that people, once they have more money to spend – and I'm going to give you a good example now in a minute. I think that when there's more money in people's pockets, they'll spend the money and the economy will grow. I think it's the best thing – we take money away from people and the snowball effect is that there are so many businesses that will hurt.

I had a really good friend of mine that's into a hardware store. This year, he has decided not to sell any lumber because his business, basically, is for renovations. He does a lot of renovations, whether it's shingles, windows, doors and stuff like this. He's not into major construction like your Kent or your Home Depot or those places. It is a lot smaller than those. But his thing to me was – and this is what he told me: Kevin, listen, people are not spending their money anymore because they can't afford it. They're taxed too much. They have no money in their pocket to repair that roof, to put in those windows.

That again has an effect not only on that guy who owns the Home Hardware or the hardware store, but it has an effect on the guy who's doing the roofing, who employs – like in my community of Flatrock, I think there are three different roofing companies. I think we're the capital of the roofers on the east end. We do more roofing – anybody needs a roof done, they can call me and I'll give you a couple of names. Anyway, that's what they do. But I spoke to those guys and usually they'll have work.

I spoke to a real good friend of mine the other day. Usually, this time of year, he's telling me that he doesn't have – he can go right to August now before he can probably do a roof. Every week now he's looking to pick up work, because people are not spending their money. You know what that generates. That generates probably four or five other people that are working with him and it also generates an amount of money they spend, whether they buy gas, whether they go to a convenience store. When people got money and spend money – and I'm convinced of

it – is that people will generate revenue and they end up paying taxes and it's confidence – that's true, there's a lot of confidence. When people think that they don't have any work, they haul back. They haul back and they'll say, listen, I can't afford to do that this year. I can't afford to put that window in this year. I can't afford to do my roof this year.

We need to make sure – and that's the reason why we'd like to see that levy eliminated right away. Let's get away so people have some money. And not only the levy, we have to go back to what happened with taxes. And I'll say it to my colleagues all the time. I'll say it to my colleagues here, if we meet or anything at all, the most important issue in this province right now is our economy. We need to do something to kick-start our economy and make sure that people are spending a few dollars and generating a bit of revenue. We got to have it.

Listen, it was the number one issue when I knocked on people's doors: My son and my daughter are moving away. I can't afford to do this. I can't afford to do that. We can't afford this. We're in the smallest province in Atlantic Canada here now, other than PEI, but we live in a small province. When you see families moving away, the effect that that will have on our economy is unbelievable, because that's less taxes that we're collecting. We don't have 4 or 5 million people to draw from, we have 500,000 and that has a huge effect.

One of the things that we did mention in our letter also was child care. I know from my own family's perspective, I have two little grandchildren, as you all know – I always mention them here in the House of Assembly. I'd like to see myself have a couple of more grandchildren, but the cost of having children today is unbelievable. You can talk to any young family. You talk to a young family and the biggest cost to families in this province who have young children is daycare and the cost of daycare. Most families – just look how we grew up. I grew up in Flatrock where families had 18, 17 – I know one family had 21 children. I bet you can go back to all your communities or know people that can say the same thing. But let me tell you something today, if somebody has three children, that's a big family and, the reason

being, is because people can't afford it – can't afford it.

Mr. Speaker, that's another way we can look at our economy. I know it's a cost, but we got to grow our economy. The critic for Finance today gave great examples of how our population is getting reduced year after year after year.

But if we had affordable child care in this province – and I know there is a cost to it, but we got to look at that budget, and this is what we want, want to be able to look at the budget and say, okay, maybe we can do a little different here, do a little different there, and then we can do something with child care, but we got to learn.

I know the Minister of Justice just spoke about all of us working together and collaboration, stuff like that, that's what we want, too. Our party, we want the same thing.

Mr. Speaker, I'm only down to the last little bit, but I do want to talk a little bit about the fishery. That's what I'm the critic for, and I thank our Leader for putting me there because it's something that's very passionate to me. I always tell the story that I always grew up on the wharf in Flatrock and I could cut tongues, but I don't know, there's a fella from Bay Bulls here now that he says he can cut a whole lot more tongues than I could cut, but we're going to have a contest one of these days and just see who can do it.

MS. P. PARSONS: (Inaudible) in Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

MR. K. PARSONS: And Harbour Grace - Port de Grave, too, another area.

Our fishery is in a time where we need to step up to the plate. We need to step up and we need to tell Ottawa, listen, enough is enough. Now, we need strong leadership. We need to be able to tell our seven MPs in Ottawa, listen here, enough is enough. When we see what we see in our fishery this day the adjacency – and I mean the new *Fisheries Act* came in, only last year, with not the mention of adjacency in it. That's unbelievable. Those are our resources; they're the same thing as our oil resources.

It was in our Blue Book; our response to the fishermen's union, same thing. We should be treating our fishery the same way we treat our oil industry, no different, and we do it with joint management. We're not asking for us to have full, 100 per cent control; we're asking to have a say at the table. And we brought in a private Member's motion two years ago in this House of Assembly that everybody in this House stood up and agreed to, that we were going to tell Ottawa that listen here, enough is enough, we want joint management of our fishery.

Since then, what have we done? Nothing. And we have issues – every time you look, there's a quota cut. There's a cut to our mackerel, there's a cut to our crab, there's a cut to our shrimp, our cod isn't growing back, but we have absolutely no say about it, and that's what's wrong. And that's what I'd like to see this government do, is stand up for the fishery in our province. Stand up for the harvesters, stand up for the plant workers and stand up for the people. We'd never be here only for our fishery. We'd never be here in this province enjoying beautiful districts and a beautiful country like we have in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I hope we all can work together and do this budget and do it right. It's just not the point of saying here it is, we did it before. Let's do it right. Let's do it right for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity today to speak to *Budget 2019*.

I really believe that *Budget 2019* is strategic in how we are continuing to deal with our province's economic, social and fiscal challenges. Our government's financial plan is one of balance, Mr. Speaker, where we focus on reducing spending within government while maintaining spending on services and programs outside of government. Whenever possible, we are looking to spend more on our citizens.

Over the last couple of years we have come a long way, and I can say without a doubt that we have made this province a better place for us, our children and their children. We know that our fiscal problems did not arise overnight. We also know that we are facing challenges delivering services to dispersed and aging population, but our role as a government is to ensure that all residents in this province have equal access and a comparable level of service to other jurisdictions in this country.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to talk about the Autism Action Plan. The Autism Action Plan is one of the reasons why we need *Budget 2019*. Most of my colleagues know that I am the mother of 23-year-old son who has autism spectrum disorder. He's non-verbal, with a number of other diagnoses.

On February 24, 1999, I was immersed into the world of autism. I knew nothing about autism, even as a registered nurse. At that time, the statistics were one in 10,000. Today, the statistics in Newfoundland and Labrador are one in 57. In Canada, they are one in 66; one in 10,000, to one in 57 in 20 years, Mr. Speaker.

Our government has identified and recognized the need, Mr. Speaker, through the Department of Health and Community Services, Education and Early Childhood, CSSD, Justice and Public Safety. Numerous departments have worked in a collaborative way to come together to put forward the Autism Action Plan. We need *Budget 2019* for the Autism Action Plan, Mr. Speaker. This is a three-year plan. It is holistic, it is person-centred.

When I was introduced to the world of autism, I was a registered nurse. I worked in neonatology. I had one older daughter, she was two years older than my son. She, in fact, is gifted, she's advanced. So here I was immersed in a world with a child who is gifted and a child who has autism spectrum disorder. We lived in rural Newfoundland where there were zero resources.

The only space that existed here in the City of St. John's was a little office on Torbay Road that the Autism Society had set up at that time. The Elaine Dobbin Centre did not exist when he was diagnosed. I remember my first day going into this office, and it was piled high with boxes of

plants. They were selling bulbs to try to fundraise money so they could start the autism centre, the Elaine Dobbin Centre as it exists today. I remember knocking on the door and trying to look in around the boxes to get the support of one, lone employee who was working part time.

Autism was unknown. We had a concept, an idea. I had prayed that my son had Asperger's when we were going to the doctor. I had done a bit of research, and I had come to the conclusion that perhaps a life with Asperger's would be easier than a life with autism; but, in actual fact, autism is autism, and every child that is diagnosed with autism is different. No two children are alike. There are some similarities in their social interaction, their taste, how they relate to society and space as a whole, how they communicate, but no two children are alike.

My son is severely autistic, but because of this province and because of government, he was one of the children that was selected for the Applied Behavioural Analysis pilot project. I gave up work and I became his full home therapist in North Harbour, in rural Newfoundland. We hired a lady who lived in the community and she was trained to do ABA one-on-one with him, and it helped us keep our child at home.

He was severely autistic. I remember one day that he temper-tantrumed up to 10 hours. We used to have to take the phone off the hook to do ABA, but because of Applied Behavioural Analysis, because of therapy, because government invested in the children with autism, my son still lives in our house here. He is supported by three home care workers, two part-time and one full time at the present moment, and we still do aspects of ABA with him because that's how he adapted to society.

This Autism Action Plan is based on the best evidence that's currently available. The Department of Health and Community Services will lead the implementation of the plan in collaboration with other government departments, Indigenous governments and organizations, regional health authorities, school districts and community groups.

In an effort to deliver on a sound Autism Action Plan for the province, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has also partnered with world leaders. Mr. Speaker, we're investing into the program called JASPER, Joint Attention, Symbolic Play, Engagement & Regulation. I have very limited experience personally with JASPER because we invested all our time and a lot of our own private money into ABA; however, I do have friends and family members who are using JASPER quite successfully in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador today.

Mr. Speaker, this is going to be a whole of government approach. It's a holistic approach. The implementation of this plan will see us with short-term goals and objectives; 19 actions to be substantially completed in year one. So the objective is to have this completed by March 2020.

This Autism Action Plan is in the 2019 budget. The medium, 22 actions to be substantially completed by year two, which will be March 2021, and the long-term will be completed by March 2022.

This Autism Action Plan focuses on awareness, acceptance, diagnosis and assessment of ASD. Now, no doubt, we have been doing this for 20 years, but with one in 56 children being diagnosed with autism in accordance with the Diagnostic Statistical Manual, we still need awareness, acceptance, diagnosis and assessment of ASD. I would say probably everyone in this House of Assembly today either is related to or knows someone, or knows a friend who has a child with ASD. That is how prevalent ASD is, Mr. Speaker.

Support for individuals, families and caregivers living with ASD. As I alluded to a few minutes ago, Mr. Speaker, the support we had was a little office on Torbay Road after we were diagnosed at the Janeway. It was the old Janeway at that time down in Pleasantville. I was involved with the Elaine Dobbin Centre and the building of the Elaine Dobbin Centre. I sat on the board of directors as the chair for a short period of time but, primarily, as a board member. I saw the Elaine Dobbin Centre grow and flourish, and I saw the demand. Even as we grew and we expanded, we thought we would be able to meet

the needs of the children that were being diagnosed and the adults who had received no services.

So, again, my child was the oldest child in Newfoundland and Labrador to be on the provincial pilot. He did both the Zelazo, which is the behavioural type, and the Carl Navalto, which was the more structured ABA. He did both because I stayed with the Zelazo model, which was strictly behavioural. I believe there were 10 of us that started it and only four of us ended it. Six just couldn't – they didn't have capacity in rural Newfoundland to do it. And because I stayed to the end, they offered me also to do the Carl Navalto, and I did meet with Dr. Navalto. We were one of the last families to meet with him, and that's how we started the structure at ABA, but my son wasn't even able to do structured ABA when he was diagnosed. My son, where he wasn't able to do structured ABA, I know that there are many families in this province today, as I stand here in this House of Assembly and talk about autism, that are in the same place today as I was 20 years ago, Mr. Speaker.

That is, when a child is diagnosed you go to the hospital, you get your diagnosis, you go home and you say what now – what now. But the government of the day put ABA in place and, today, we want to put JASPER in place and we want to support it through the Autism Action Plan.

Mr. Speaker, timely information is required, assessments are required, support plans are required, individualized education plans are required and resources are required. To have a child with autism is a very expensive endeavour, Mr. Speaker. When we had our son, you could barely purchase – let alone find – services. So we tried to purchase speech language pathology, which we managed to, and then we had to commute back and forth. We purchased occupational therapy services for him because he wouldn't eat. He only ate 10 items. We had to purchase the services of Shirley Sutton.

Shirley Sutton lived in Ontario. So myself and three or four more families got together, we flew Shirley in to the Autism Society, she did the therapy and treatment there, taught all these families how to do it and then she flew back. We

couldn't even purchase it here in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, parent support groups are a very important part of raising a child with autism. I have to give credit to the Elaine Dobbin Centre and its capacity to bring parents together all across Newfoundland and Labrador so that we could support each other in the different areas of the province.

The implementation of the focus area number three is going to result in evidence-based interventions at home, in the community, in regulated child care and in school, through the Provincial Autism Services Program. These interventions include, and are not limited to, as I said, the JASPER program for children up to age eight, and supporting children beyond grade three through the ABA program for children and youth up to age 21. This will be the first time that children and young adults in Newfoundland and Labrador will be supported through ABA up to age 21.

Mr. Speaker, that's key because a child with autism is a child with autism but there's also an adult with autism. Just this weekend, on Sunday, even though my son has been really good and ABA has really worked for him, we had a situation on Sunday when we were leaving my parents' house, we were taking some of my election signs back that were there and the signs just didn't go in the car the way he wanted them to go in and he had a total meltdown.

So he's 23 years old, in the parking lot at my parents, having a total meltdown, but I know how to deal with it because I, too, as a parent have been trained in ABA. So I knew how to bring him back so he could calm down to get him back to St. John's.

Education for Children and Youth Living with ASD – so there are a number of individuals, and I have a couple of friends who are diagnosed with ASD, who can work very successfully in society. Actually, some of them are extremely bright and very smart and some of the best employees you can have, especially when it relates to computer analysis and data entry and different jobs of such. So all children and adults – but all children have a right to a quality education within a safe, caring and inclusive

learning environment, and that is a part of enhancing this autism plan.

Children living with ASD enter early-years programs and the K-12 system with a variety of strengths and learning needs. These factors must be considered when making decisions regarding approaches to teaching and learning.

I was lucky, Mr. Speaker, we lived in rural Newfoundland and my son went to a rural school and I had a good relationship with the teachers and the principal and with the families. When he went to school, I remember at the time he was a wicked runner – wicked. I was really nervous, so I'd come and I'd park in front of the school and I'd stay there while he was in school in case they needed me. And they didn't have a fence in front of the school. So I lobbied and got the fence there. But society and community were upset with me because I had changed the view and the scenery was gone now, because here was this fence in front of the school. But year's later, parents came to me and said, thank God you lobbied for that fence.

So education and living with autism and the awareness component is key, Mr. Speaker. And there is funding allocated in this action plan to enable that to happen.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to say, the Geneva Centre, I have some experience going to the Geneva Centre and the accountability and the professional learning and the development component, that's all engaged here. I can say that I definitely was after the Minister of Health and Community Services constantly as this plan was being developed, and it's probably a good thing I was a little bit apart from it, being in Service NL. But I was constantly, constantly saying do you have this, do you have that, do you remember this, do you have that. And I was trying to, in my mind, just take the whole span of life from the time you were diagnosed with autism until the time you actually pass away with a diagnosis of autism.

As the executive director for the Newfoundland and Labrador Association for Community Living, I had some experience with Brighter Futures. It was a program that was done long before my time. But it was when the Association for Community Living was moving some

individuals with intellectual disabilities from the Waterford Hospital into community. As the executive director, we were doing some success stories and I went out and I had the opportunity to meet some individuals who were diagnosed with autism many years ago when people didn't even know what the diagnosis was or how to deal with it and they were placed in the Waterford Hospital in isolation.

Then they were allowed to come back out into community through the Brighter Futures program. They were embraced by loving people who really helped individuals go back into community. They had birthday parties for the first time. They attended community events for their first time. They attended family events for their first time.

Mr. Speaker, this Autism Action Plan is the way forward. It started years ago, 20-odd years ago, but it is the way forward and our government has reached out to community, they have reached out to the Elaine Dobbin Centre, we have reached out to individuals themselves who are living with ASD, and family members who are living with ASD, and we've developed the Autism Action Plan. I have to also say the staff at Health and Community Services and staff throughout government departments had a huge part to play in this.

In this document, you'll note it in appendix A the implementation timelines and the short-term actions and who's responsible for each action. So it's clearly laid out here: regional health authorities, Health and Community Services, Justice and Public Safety, Education and Early Childhood Development, Children, Seniors and Social Development, AESL, so it is an all-of-government approach.

I strongly believe that we need *Budget 2019* because I strongly believe, as a mother of a son with autism spectrum disorder, as an advocate for autism, as the Minister of Service NL and as the MHA for the District of Placentia - St. Mary's, that this plan is needed, this plan is in *Budget 2019*, and I strongly support *Budget 2019*.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Given the hour, I would move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that the House do now adjourn. I would also, prior to doing that, just remind Members of Justice Estimates at 6 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that this House do now adjourn.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: All those against?

Carried.

Consistent with Standing Order 9(2), this House stands adjourned until tomorrow morning at 10 o'clock.

Thank you.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, at 10 a.m.