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Speaker: Honourable Perry Trimper, MHA

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June 18, 2019

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

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

Order, please!

I welcome the Members back to this House of Assembly.

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: Today we'll hear Members' statements from the hon. Members for the Districts of Conception Bay South; St. George's - Humber; Mount Scio; Grand Falls-Windsor – Buchans, and Stephenville - Port au Port.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, on May 30, I had the opportunity to attend and present Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Awards to 12 deserving young students at Frank Roberts Junior High in Foxtrap.

To qualify, participants must undertake a balanced program of leisure-time activities such as community service, areas of self-development, adventurous journeys, physical fitness and skill development.

This group has been involved in many challenging and worthwhile activities under the direction of committed volunteer leaders. In speaking with participants individually, they tell stories of personal growth and commitment as they embarked on the various challenges and opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to congratulate: Mac Butters, Jimmy Cluney, Emma Dalton, Katherine Eason, Isabella Greeley, Matthew Hillier, Brady Lawrence, Rasami Newman, Ella D. Smith, Grace Sparkes, Nora Taylor and Bree-Ann Warren.

This is quite an accomplishment and I wish them all well in their future endeavours.

Thank you very much.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of St. George's - Humber.

MR. REID: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to make Members and, indeed, all listeners aware of one of the largest cultural events taking place in this province over the summer. The Bay St. George Powwow which will be held in Flat Bay on July 12, 13 and 14.

A Powwow is a unique event signified by social exchange, cultural sharing and ceremonial rituals. Indeed, the Powwow is a time of teaching, learning, singing, dancing, feasting, sharing and healing. Powwows are an expression of culture, pride and identity. It is a unifying ritual for the young and the old, a recollection of the past and a celebration of the future.

The Bay St. George Powwow is a showpiece of the cultural revival which is happening amongst the Mi'kmaq people in this province. It is a wonderful event for everyone who wants to fully understand the multicultural nature of this province.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all Members of the House and the general public to attend the Bay St. George Powwow in Flat Bay on July 12, 13 and 14 of this year.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for the District of Mount Scio.

MS. STOODLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight one of the many excellent schools in my District of Mount Scio.

In May of this year, students at Leary's Brook Junior High practised their coding skills, creating games using the programming language Scratch. In a Brilliant Labs Scratch Competition, grades four to six students at Leary's Brook

Junior High won three provincial awards for the games they created.

The Best Artistic Design winner was awarded to the game The Cookie Mystery by student coders Salina and Madison, under the leadership of teacher Stacey Hopkins; the Best Artistic Design runner-up was awarded to the Cool Cupcakery game by student coders Jane and Brooklyn, under the leadership of Mme. Carey; and the Best Technical runner-up was awarded to the game Star Swarm by Jadon, under the leadership of teacher Stacey Hopkins.

I ask all Members to join me in congratulating Leary's Brook Junior High students Salina, Madison, Jane, Brooklyn and Jadon on their impressive achievement, and for their parents and teachers for supporting their technical and creative coding skills.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

MR. TIBBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this House today to commemorate the accomplishments of Captain Adrian Whiffen.

Captain Whiffen has been in the Cadet Instructors Cadre for 34 years. He joined 67 Windsor RCSCC as a young man, until he aged out. He enrolled as an officer in the fall of 1985, and has been in the active movement ever since. He completed his training courses and reached the rank of lieutenant.

In his time with 67 Windsor, he held the post of commanding officer twice and had been involved in marksmanship, band, training, or whatever the corps needed. He spent many summers working at HMCS Acadia, sharing his knowledge with cadets from all over the region.

In 2009, after 24 years of working with the sea cadets, Lt. Whiffen transferred to 1916 where he became Captain Whiffen. Now, he has amassed

34 years of service with the Canadian cadet movement and is retiring.

Aside from his service to the cadet movement, Captain Whiffen is a small business owner in Grand Falls-Windsor. Through his business, Lefty's Pizza, he has sponsored many organizations throughout the community. Today, we recognize Captain Adrian Whiffen and all he has done to mould the young cadets that have passed through the program which have lead them to great success.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to recognize Harrison Porter, a student of Stephenville High School.

Harrison will graduate high school this year. Harrison has been a member of 2904 Royal Canadian Army Cadet Corps, Stephenville, for six years. During his time in cadets, Harrison has had the opportunity to participate in many activities.

His more memorable experiences with the cadet movement have included, travelling across PEI as a participant in The Canada 150 Confederation Race. He's taken part in a six-week cultural and training exchange to the United Kingdom as a cadet representing Canada who visited Scotland, Wales, England, Belgium and France. As well, he attended an expedition to the Columbia Ice Fields in Alberta.

In 2019, he was selected and attended a two-week international expedition and hiked and kayaked through the mountains of Chile. In June, he will travel to Washington, DC as one of two Army cadets from Canada to attend a one-week Junior Leadership & Academic Bowl.

Harrison was offered early acceptance to The Royal Military College of Canada and accepted with the intentions of studying Chemical Engineering. He was also offered a career as an

Electrical and Mechanical Engineering Officer upon completion of his studies.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in wishing Harrison well as he begins his career pursuits.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

MS. DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize June as Recreation Month. This year's theme – Recreation Can – highlights the many ways being active and involved in recreational activities can enrich the lives of individuals, families and communities.

Recreation creates social connections, provides opportunities for personal growth, encourages the development of leadership skills, promotes regular physical activity and improves physical and mental health. At the community level, recreation brings people of all ages together to participate in activities that enrich quality of life and support social and economic development.

As a government, we recognize the vital role recreation plays in helping us lead healthy, active and balanced lives. We remain committed to increasing awareness and engaging individuals and communities to take action to promote healthy active living.

Through our Community Healthy Living Fund, we provide funding for such initiatives as the trail development, recreation facility upgrades, playgrounds, community gardens, 50+ exercise and activity programs, youth recreation activities and healthy eating programs in communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

We also provide funding to Recreation Newfoundland and Labrador to offer leadership and training for recreation professionals and volunteers, advance and support recreation and sport opportunities for persons with disabilities, and promote and support people to pursue recreation activities during their leisure time.

I would like to thank Recreation Newfoundland and Labrador and the many community recreation partners and volunteers throughout the province for their ongoing efforts to provide recreation opportunities to residents.

I encourage all hon. Members and all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to celebrate Recreation Month by sharing their love for recreation with others to encourage their participation. I invite everyone to explore the many ways recreation can benefit them, their families and their communities through improved physical, mental and social well-being.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

MR. DWYER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to thank the hon. minister for the advance copy of her statement. Mr. Speaker, all of us on this side of the House do join the minister in recognizing June as Recreation Month. As the minister noted, recreation provides a vital opportunity for individuals to get out in their communities, leading active and balanced lives.

Mr. Speaker, through partners like Recreation NL and many local community organizations and service groups who avail of the Community Living Fund, residents can enjoy many opportunities; however, it was disappointing to learn in Estimates that the minister has slashed funding the very groups and organizations who are trying to help us overcome the chronic issues among our population of obesity, heart disease and diabetes. Clearly, we should be investing more in these areas to break the cycle in our society and improve health outcomes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

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

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

I thank the minister for the advance copy of her statement. I would like to commend the Recreation NL for their hard work training professionals and volunteers and expending opportunities for recreation and sports in our communities.

Definitely our population needs to be more active and changing attitudes to embrace a healthier way of life takes leadership. I challenge my hon. colleagues to show leadership by organizing community recreation events to get more people more active.

I also urge the government to ensure they consult with communities and make sure they have resources they need to provide recreation opportunities. This is a prime example of where a small investment has enormous payoff for our health system and for the health of our province down the road.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further statements by ministers?

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

MR. WARR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to congratulate Shiloh Burton of Springdale and Kendra Burden of Port Hope Simpson, who have been named two of 50 Schulich Leaders across Canada.

Awarded annually, this scholarship recognizes entrepreneurial-minded high school graduates enrolling in a Science, Technology, Engineering or Math program at one of 20 partner universities across Canada.

Shiloh Burton of Indian River High School has been selected to receive a \$100,000 scholarship to pursue his Engineering Program at Memorial University. Kendra Burden of Bayside Academy

has been selected to receive an \$80,000 scholarship to pursue her Bachelor of Science Degree at Memorial University.

Shiloh and Kendra were selected based on their outstanding academic achievement and community-minded spirit. They represent the best and brightest Newfoundland and Labrador has to offer.

Being from Springdale as well, Mr. Speaker, I know Shiloh and his family, and I can tell you, they and his high school family at Indian River High are very pleased of his achievement.

I congratulate Shiloh and Kendra and hope their time at Memorial University enriches their lives, opens doors to new and exciting opportunities and fulfills their long-term goals.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating Shiloh and Kendra and to wish them every success in their future endeavours.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for the District of Bonavista.

MR. PARDY: Mr. Speaker, allow me to thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement as well. On behalf of the Official Opposition, I join the minister in congratulating Shiloh Burton and Kendra Burden on this tremendous success.

Being named as two of the 50 Schulich Leaders across the Canada is a remarkable achievement, which should be celebrated, especially when we consider that there were over 1,500 nominees. The Schulich Leader scholarships are among the most prestigious awards in the Canadian education system and are perhaps the highest achievement for students studying science, engineering, technology and math. These scholarships will allow Shiloh and Kendra to focus on their studies for the next number of years without having to worry about the financial stress of tuition or living expenses.

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate Shiloh Burton and Kendra Burden on this accomplishment and I wish them every success as they pursue their post-secondary degrees here at Memorial University.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

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

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

I also thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. I join the minister in congratulating both Shiloh Burton and Kendra Burden on the honour of being named two of Canada's 50 Schulich Leaders for 2019. Achieving this honour is indeed a tremendous accomplishment, and I'm delighted that both Shiloh and Kendra have chosen to continue their studies at Memorial University.

It is encouraging to see some of our province's best and brightest students choose to stay here in Newfoundland and Labrador. I wish them both continued success in their studies and, once again, congratulate them on this extraordinary achievement.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

MR. CROSBIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, when is the date of the next offshore land sale, and in the face of oil industry fears, is the Minister of Natural Resources concerned that Trudeau Bill C-69 will drive

investment jobs and prosperity away from Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The next offshore sale will be in November of 2019, as per normal in our rotational basis: November 2019. But allow me to say to the Member opposite, fear mongering is not helpful at this point in time. We have CEAA 2012, which did not offer many incentives or inducements for development of our offshore oil and gas industry.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, for a 30- to 60-day exploration of wells, it can take up to three years under the 2012 legislation. We're looking and working – this government and CAPP and Noia and others are working to ensure that we can streamline the process so that we can continue development offshore. I will remind the Member that we've had eight new entrants in our offshore in the last number of years.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. CROSBIE: Mr. Speaker, both the Premier and his Minister of Natural Resources have a fondness for referring to the Harper government environmental legislation, known as CEAA, when asked about conflict between Trudeau Bill C-69 and the Atlantic Accord.

Is the Premier aware that the Harper government was proceeding with legislation to make C-NLOPB the sole regulator when the 2015 federal election was called and that it was the Trudeau Liberal government that decided against making C-NLOPB the sole regulator?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Allow me to remind the Member opposite who likes to speak in hyperbole and references to all kinds of things that happened in the past as if they did not happen. Allow me to say to the Member opposite, between 2010 and 2012, CEAA, the Canadian Environmental Assessment act processes, the bill itself, was winding its way through, I didn't hear much in the community, Mr. Speaker, from either the PC government in Newfoundland and Labrador or the federal Harper government on this very important issue and the erosion of the joint management functions under the Atlantic Accord.

I will say to the Member opposite that, yes, there was some discussion around they were going to set a responsible authority for C-NLOPB; but, indeed, Mr. Speaker, in the three years, it did not happen.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

I do remind all Members, I will not tolerate any interruptions, chirping or heckling or anything else.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition, please.

MR. CROSBIE: I'll take that as a kind of a yes.

Yesterday, the Premier told the House that if Bill C-69 violates the Atlantic Accord legislation we could use the recently negotiated arbitration clause.

Is he referring to the clause in the Hibernia Dividend Backed Annuity Agreement dated April 1, 2019? Can he explain how a clause for resolution of disputes under that agreement could be used to resolve conflicts between Bill C-69 and the Atlantic Accord legislation?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I know the Member opposite does not like to talk about the successes of this government, but

I can say this government has been very successful in dealing with the Atlantic Accord and really did negotiate with the federal government to take all the monies that were accruing to the federal government from Hibernia Management and bring them to the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. The first time in history that was ever done, Mr. Speaker.

I can tell you that, yes, in those discussions there was an agreement made that there will be an arbitration clause, and should we need to exercise that arbitration clause, Mr. Speaker, this province certainly will do so. We'll exercise any remedies that we have to ensure the Atlantic Accord is respected.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. CROSBIE: Mr. Speaker, that's a great answer for blowing smoke over the fact that the Premier's reference to an arbitration clause as a solution here is nonsensical.

Has the Premier lobbied Ottawa to make the Newfoundland and Labrador offshore exempt from Trudeau's Bill C-69 and to make C-NLOPB the sole regulator, including environmental regulator?

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

MS. COADY: Now, Mr. Speaker, I will say, I don't blow smoke. I will say that quite strongly to this House. I answered his question quite thoroughly and quite well, I will say.

It might be his interpretation that that was smoke, but I can tell you from my interpretation it was facts. Allow me to give one more fact to the Member opposite, Mr. Speaker. We have a system called joint management that was well thought and well argued back in the 1980s, and we are going to make sure that the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador upholds its joint management as well in this regard.

Newfoundland and Labrador is a joint partner with the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board. We believe the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board is the best vehicle in order to have environmental assessment.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Mr. Speaker, I'm not hearing an answer to the question, which was pretty straightforward.

Have they lobbied for that exemption? Furthermore, has the government requested the federal government to remove offshore exploratory wells from the designated project list, and would this removal be a full cure to the problem of conflict with the Atlantic Accords?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, I will remind this House, that this has been a top priority for me and this government since 2016.

Multiple documents, multiple meetings, trips to Ottawa, discussions with ministers, discussions with senators, briefings to Members of Parliament have occurred over the last three years. And yes, Mr. Speaker, we have worked very, very hard to ensure that exploration was removed from the project list. That's the first thing, and we are now underway with a regional environmental assessment that will allow that to occur.

Let me ask the Member opposite a very serious question: What has he done on this very important and serious issue over the last year?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

After months of asking for support and a renewed collaborative arrangement, the Autism Society has issued eight layoffs while reducing other positions to part-time.

Will the minister confirm these cuts across the province?

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

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

Our Autism Action Plan is an inherent and integral part of *Budget 2019*. The Autism Society receives core funding from two departments in government, one being CSSD and one being Health. That funding has not changed, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Autism Action Plan was announced just before the election on April 17. Launched with much fanfare, the plan was billed as the way forward on autism. Unfortunately, the immediate impact on autism clients has been less programs and services with fewer supports. Clients and parents feel betrayed.

How can the minister continue to support this plan?

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

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

The plan is baked into the budget. The Autism Society of Newfoundland and Labrador are in complete support of this. I heard very clearly on the doors, bring this plan on.

We are debating the budget as we speak. As soon as the Members opposite pass it, the sooner we can get on with it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There's no doubt that the Autism Society approved and supported a plan. The difference is being able to implement it with lack of funding. Therein becomes the problem, and it has nothing to do with the budget line there. It has to do with what the line items are going to be down the road.

Mr. Speaker, our office has received calls and emails from clients and parents concerned over these massive cuts to the Autism Society. One-on-one programming has been cancelled, inclusive activities have been curtailed and community outreach has been stopped.

Why does the minister support the gutting of the Autism Society?

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

MR. HAGGIE: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the question.

The Member opposite is referring to the activities of the Autism Society. No funding changes have been made to the Autism Society. We cannot implement our Autism Action Plan until we have the resources to add the resources necessary to bring that in. That is part of the budget. That is what we're debating. That is what the hold up is. That is what we went and got our mandate from the people of this province on. The plan is in the budget.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, controversy continues to swell around the proposed location of the new Waterford Hospital. Historical data and flood map analysis both show the proposed location is prone to flooding.

Why is the Minister of Transportation and Works ignoring these concerns?

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, we are certainly not ignoring the concerns. These concerns actually date back to, I think it was 2014 when Eastern Health went out and had a berm design. Actually, they had an independent consultant come in and look at the flooding issues in that area of St. John's, and the consultant back in 2014 said there was need for a berm.

When we heard back from the people involved in the plan for a new mental health facility, they said they wanted it at this location to remove stigma and for other reasons, Mr. Speaker. So then we asked the engineers to go back and look at that study and see if there was a way to actually extend that berm, which we have done, that makes the site safe.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the City of St. John's, who have done their own expert analysis, have indicated they will never approve a development at that location. The deputy mayor has said the proposal is nonsensical.

So, Minister, why are you riding roughshod over the City of St. John's?

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

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

Mr. Speaker, we are not running roughshod over the City of St. John's. I have many conversations with the Mayor of St. John's. Back in October of 2018, the deputy mayor and all the councillors in St. John's were given a presentation that shows the use of both berms, now the north berm and the south berm. We're actually improving that area of St. John's.

If you think about the investments that have been there over the last few years, we have a new core science facility, we have an ever-expanding Health Sciences facility and we have a new Janeway facility, Mr. Speaker. There's been so much development in that area. With the new design of these berms we're not only protecting the existing infrastructure, we're protecting future infrastructure as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed berms are not a guarantee, given the drainage can be blocked by debris and storms. During Hurricane Igor, the Health Sciences Centre came within inches of being flooded.

So why won't the minister listen to these concerns and come up with a better plan?

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

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Speaker, the Member opposite alludes to Igor, and that's the reason why there was need for a berm in the first place. Anywhere we look at building, we take all these factors into consideration.

But we heard quite clearly from the mental health community. We heard quite clearly from

the people who suffer from mental health challenges and family members of people who suffer from mental health challenges. They want this facility attached to the acute-care facility. This is about reducing stigmas for the people of our province, and we are committed to the plan to put the facility at the Health Sciences Centre.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd remind the minister, I was a Member of the All-Party Committee on Mental Health and I get the fact of removing stigmas, I'm all over that, but you have to put it in the right place.

So, Minister, maybe you could table the geotechnical studies that have been done in this area, because we know changing water flows can have serious impacts elsewhere. You're stopping it there, but it's going elsewhere.

Can you table any documents or any studies, please?

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

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

Mr. Speaker, about a week ago in Estimates, I offered the Member opposite a briefing to come into the Department of Transportation and look at the work that's been done. And guess what? He hasn't taken us up on the offer. That offer stands. If the Member opposite wants to come in and take that briefing, he's more than welcome to come in.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LESTER: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I asked the Minister of Environment to provide information on the proposed plastic bag ban.

Can the minister provide us a target date for implementation of the ban?

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

MS. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I mentioned yesterday, it was at the tail end of Question Period, that we did amend the *Environmental Protection Act* that would allow provisions within the Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment to make the necessary regulation and policy changes.

Mr. Speaker, we were really pleased when we went out and consulted. We had more than 3,000 people that weighed in in the feedback – the highest we’ve ever had on the EngageNL website. Before the end of this calendar year, we hope to have a full implementation of the plastic bags. But in the meantime, every day, there’s no reason why people can’t start today to reduce the use of plastics in this province. We encourage that.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LESTER: Mr. Speaker, government has provided no information about the potential fees, the transition time, possible alternatives, or when the bag ban will take effect.

Can the minister provide details as to when and how this ban will be both implemented and regulated?

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

MS. DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, I think I did allude to a time frame, before the end of this calendar year. We recognize that we need to give people time to adjust. While there are many people out there who are in support of this ban,

sometimes these things, they don’t happen overnight. So we’re encouraging people to reduce their use of plastic right now but, in the meantime, the department continues to work on the regulations.

The decisions that we make going forward are certainly being informed by these more than 3,000 pieces of feedback that we have heard in the department through the EngageNL website.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. LESTER: Mr. Speaker, we were told the details of the ban will be set out in the regulations.

Will the public be allowed to see the regulations prior to implementation?

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

MS. DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, we’ve been pretty open and transparent in this process to date. We actually went out and we invited public comment because the success of all of this – we wanted to know where people’s thoughts were and if they were ready of this Newfoundland and Labrador. I’m sure, Mr. Speaker, that they will be able to have further input.

I’ll get some information and I’ll get back to the hon. Member on that.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. LESTER: Mr. Speaker, the federal government recently committed to ban all single-use plastics.

Is the provincial government committing to expand the plastic bag ban to include all single-use plastics?

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

MS. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In reference to the earlier question, what I'll say to the Member is that the consultations that we held did have very specific questions that will inform the policy and the regulation changes that we make going forward.

Mr. Speaker, there's no doubt when we think about climate change and we think about greenhouse gas emissions and the direction we are moving in as a province and a country, we want to reduce waste, we want to reduce plastic and we need to do that.

The science is very clear, Mr. Speaker. We have lots to be concerned about when we look forward, even to the next decade, and we'll continue to move in the direction that is necessary.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

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

MR. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question is for the Minister of Transportation. During the summer of 2018, portions of the Hansen highway, Route 490, to Stephenville were resurfaced; however, certain sections of that resurfacing have started to deteriorate. Residents of the area have been told that there is a two-year warranty on this work.

Can the minister confirm that this pavement resurfacing actually have a two-year warranty?

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

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

I thank the hon. Member for the question. I can confirm that all work that's carried out by the Department of Transportation and Works with independent contractors holds a two-year

warranty. We actually hold a bond, Mr. Speaker, on the materials and labour for two years.

We became aware of this situation on that highway back I think it was in late winter early fall. Our staff have been there. Our engineering staff have been there and looked at the situation. There's further analysis ongoing but we'll continue to follow up on that, as we will with other circumstances we find ourselves in in the province like this one.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. WAKEHAM: Yes, Mr. Speaker, can the minister ensure that the necessary repairs to the pavement will be carried out before the warranty expires?

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

MR. CROCKER: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker, we will actually get to a conclusion of this in the coming weeks and I'll be more than willing to share those findings with the Member opposite when we have an opportunity to actually review what our engineering staff finds.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. WAKEHAM: I thank the minister for that.

During the summer of 2018 while this pavement resurfacing was being carried out on Route 490, a kilometre of road in the adjacent community of Cold Brook needing resurfacing was not included.

I ask the minister: Can he review the resurfacing of this one kilometre of road in Cold Brook and take advantage of economies of scale and

potentially have this pavement resurfaced while the paving equipment in the area is doing the repair work that's needed on the other one?

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

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

Mr. Speaker, anytime we're in a region, we always do try to take advantage of economies of scale; but obviously, we do work within budgets. I'm not familiar with the piece of road that the Member opposite is referring to, but I'll certainly have a look at it for him.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

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

MR. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My next question is for the Minister of Finance. I ask the minister: Did the request for proposals for retail cannabis licences fall under the *Public Procurement Act* and, if not, why not?

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The request for proposals went out through the Newfoundland and Labrador Liquor Corporation. Mr. Speaker, I feel and I believe that they've done a good job in rolling out that program, in providing access to the general public of retail cannabis and of the procurement of the retail sites.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

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

MR. WAKEHAM: Mr. Speaker, a local cannabis retail company, Better Leaf, was denied a retail cannabis licence.

When the NLC's scoring matrix was released to us through ATIPP, the local cannabis companies proposal ranked better than a large national organization whose proposal was approved.

I ask the minister: Why did Loblaw's receive a retail cannabis licence over Better Leaf, despite Better Leaf scoring better on their application?

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is an important question; I thank the Member for the question. I believe the Citizens' Rep reviewed this particular case and decided that the NLC made the appropriate decision. I understand, in my conversation with the NLC in regard to this decision, they did it because a tier 1 does not allow minors within the store, Mr. Speaker, and there are safety concerns if an adult goes into a store and leaves a minor out in the vehicle.

The NLC retained the right, Mr. Speaker, in locations with only a tier 1 to look at a tier-4 model, and the successful proponent got that model.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

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

MR. WAKEHAM: Mr. Speaker, were there any other applicants for retail cannabis licenses that scored higher than other applicants that did not get licenses?

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Not to my knowledge.

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

MS. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In Estimates yesterday, the Minister for the Status of Women promoted financial support for additional groups this year, including for the Coalition Against the Sexual Exploitation of Youth; yet, grants in the office are being decreased by \$210,000.

Can the minister please explain why this is occurring?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

MS. HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the hon. Member for her question. Mr. Speaker, the Status of Women office provides funding to various organizations across the province: women's centres, Bay St. George women's council, the Corner Brook Status of Women, Gander Status of Women Council, and the list goes on.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, should this budget pass in 2019, we will open a new women's centre on the Northern Peninsula.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: The minister, however, reported in Estimates yesterday, Mr. Speaker, that money is being transferred to the Housing department.

Can the minister explain and outline how much money has been transferred to Housing, and what will this funding be used for?

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

MS. DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member across the way is right. In June of '18, I

believe it was, funds and responsibility for emergency shelters folded in under Housing, as well as did transition that was from AESL, as well as did transition houses from health. That was always a view of our housing first and putting a housing continuum under one roof, it was felt that Newfoundland and Labrador Housing certainly had the expertise over there to deal with some of the complex cases that we are dealing with from day to day.

Mr. Speaker, we were supportive of that and it's working well.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

MS. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Mr. Speaker, the Office for the Status of Women have specialized experts in issues relating to women; however, the Newfoundland and Labrador's Housing mandate focuses primarily on affordable housing.

Is the minister confident that the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing is really the appropriate body to ensure that these funds are used for their intended purposes to support women?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

MS. HALEY: Yes.

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

MS. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: In Estimates yesterday, we talked about funding for women's shelters.

Can the minister, please, table details surrounding the capacity and demand of the shelters they fund?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

MS. HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the hon. Member for her question. Yes, indeed, I will table this information for the hon. Member opposite.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Is the minister aware of any situations where shelters have been full and unable to accept new clients?

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

MS. DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, I want to say that safe, stable and affordable housing and shelters and transition houses and all of those valuable programs and services we provide is certainly a priority for this government.

One of the things that we do in Housing is we do a lot of work with our partnerships, places like Stella that provide wraparound supports. When there are Housing needs in the province, if it's a case of a woman fleeing domestic violence or anything like that, they certainly move to the top of the list and are prioritized, and we do the best we can for those complex cases.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

MS. COFFIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government wants to embark on deep-water drilling for our offshore in harsh environments, where an oil spill will be nearly impossible to clean up. We have an independent federal-provincial environmental assessment process but government wants the C-NLOPB, the industry regulator, to take it over because it would be quicker.

I ask the Premier: Why would he compromise the environmental assessment and put our marine environment at risk for the sake of expediency?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A lot of what was just said is actually incorrect. What we have asked for is to have exploration removed from the project list to ensure that C-NLOPB, which are really experts in our offshore, have the ability to look at the regional environmental assessment, analyze the 30- to 60-day well, the impacts of that well. They'll only be out there for 30 to 60 days, so minor geological interruption. They will be able to have that information before them. That's what we've asked for, is to remove exploration from a full panel, 36-month review process. That is what we asked for.

As I've said, as the Premier has said, as everyone in this province has said, environmental assessment, environmental protection is critically important to all of us.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

MS. COFFIN: Mr. Speaker, the C-NLOPB is in a conflict of interest. It regulates and works with industry, it helps industry at all stages of development, but it is also supposed to protect oil workers and the environment. The near-miss with an iceberg, the 200,000 litres of oil spilled and the die out of seabirds would not have happened with tougher regulations and monitoring.

I ask the Premier: Why does government consistently refuse to consider an independent offshore environment and safety authority like Norway's, as recommended by Justice Wells in his Offshore Helicopter Safety Report?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

After Justice Wells made his report, Mr. Speaker, they did make some changes. They have a chief conservation officer, a chief safety officer that reports directly to the board. So it removes that kind of interference with other operations of the C-NLOPB. Justice Wells was quite satisfied with that. We only have four installations offshore.

As I said repeatedly in this House, this will be continued to monitor. As we continue to grow our offshore, we will consider changes to that operations, but I remind the Member opposite, we do have a chief safety officer, we do have a chief conservation officer. This does satisfy the requirements of Justice Wells at this time. As we grow, we'll continue to monitor.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

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

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

It has been months since the Husky SeaRose oil spill, the worst in the history of our province of our offshore. In March, Husky gave the C-NLOPB a preliminary report, which the offshore board has not released.

I ask the Minister of Natural Resources: How long will the public have to wait for that report and to find out what happened?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is incredibly important to the people of the province. As I've said in this House before, safety and environmental protection is paramount to everything that we do. C-NLOPB has been investigating the accident that did occur in November. As you know, the flow line has been retrieved. That is being investigated and reviewed, and there will be recommendations coming from those investigations.

I think it's critically important to the people of the province, what happened to that flow line? What happened to the flow line connection at that particular time? Was it a faulty flow line? Was it something other than that, so that we have full information? They are investigating. Once we have that investigation, we'll know what actions need to be taken.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

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

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

Yesterday, the minister referred to seismic exploration as less impactful, but there is evidence that these loud signals are harming plankton and other species. Government just announced a 3-D seismic survey off Labrador.

I ask the minister: Does she think the people of Labrador would not want an environmental assessment of 3D-seismic testing when it had negative impacts on salmon and other at-risk species?

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

MS. COADY: Again, Mr. Speaker, they do go through an environmental assessment process. That is part of what they have to do and they also have to follow through appropriate mitigation measures that are required.

I will remind the Member opposite that there have been multiple studies, including a most recent one by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans that have not found any impact. But having said that, Mr. Speaker, we still want to make sure that the environmental impacts and the environmental assessment process is adequate for the geological interruption.

I will remind the Member opposite that this is a multi-client survey that is being done so we have many, many people coming in on one survey versus having multiple surveys in the jurisdiction.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The time for Oral Question has ended.

Presenting Reports by Sanding and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given

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

MS. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I provided a Ministerial Statement on June being Recreation Month and the hon. Member for Placentia West - Bellevue asked if we supported recreation, why did we cut funding. I want to read into the record we did not cut any funding to community-based – there were absolutely no funding cuts to recreation in CSSD this year.

We did, however, transfer \$500,000 from CSSD over to the Labrador Affairs office and I did identify in Estimates that there was a reduction this year because the Labrador Winter Games only happens every three years. So I'm not sure if that might have confused the Member, but there have been no cuts to recreation.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further answers to questions?

Petitions.

Petitions

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis – by a whisker.

MR. K. PARSONS: A little bit quicker, Mr. Speaker.

The taxi industry in Newfoundland and Labrador has been failing over the past six years due to the rising costs of insurance and fuel prices. Smaller companies and brokers have left the industry by ever increasing numbers because of the rising costs preventing them from surviving.

Since 2015, accidents in the taxi industry have decreased by 34.7 per cent, yet insurance costs have increased by 244 per cent. Fuel prices continue to rise as well.

Insurance companies want to open in this province but cannot get a permit to operate, thereby creating a restrictive marketplace for insurers.

THEREFORE the petition of the undersigned call upon the House of Assembly to urge Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to provide help to the taxi industry in this province to mitigate the rising cost of insurance, as well as the rising cost of fuel.

The taxi industry is a vital part of our province, providing door-to-door service 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Without assistance, the taxi industry cannot survive.

Mr. Speaker, we saw this a little bit when the House was open previously and we had a demonstration here in the House from our taxi industry. They came in and I know they had meetings with the Premier and they had meetings with the minister. But, right now – and we're going to debate a bill later on today that's going to take off the cost of tax on insurance.

But, over the last number of years, people have to realize that the taxi industry is a small business. There are 5,000 people indirectly involved in the taxi industry. That's a huge industry in this province and they're finding it very difficult because of the rising costs and competitiveness also in the marketplace. We

need to make sure that the industry – and they're as important an industry such as the fishing industry, the mining industry. They employ a lot of people. There are a lot of families involved in the taxis and we need to make sure that this industry survives in our province. There are a lot of people employed in the taxi industry.

And they're like small businesses. I always say when I get up in the House that they're the cornerstone of our whole economy. Small businesses have to survive in this province and I call upon government to do more for the taxi industry. Right now, when they go get their insurance, there's only one group where they can be insured. Government has to be able to open the doors so other insurers can come to this province and want to insure taxi drivers.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Minister of Service NL for a response, please.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for the petition and I, myself, since July of 2017 have met numerous times with the taxi industry – I can't even count the number of times – and the minister prior to that also met with the taxi industry.

We just brought in Bill 3 and Bill 6 regarding the automobile insurance. We're also taking the tax off the automobile insurance. We've been working with the taxi industry to put together a plan of action, a business-type plan to help them professionalize their industry.

We're just waiting, Mr. Speaker, for them to come back to us. They did submit one plan to AESL and I'm waiting to have discussions regarding a secondary plan.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further petitions?

The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

MS. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

WHEREAS there have been numerous concerns raised by former inmates, family members, correctional employees, and many members of the general public regarding the physical condition of Her Majesty's Penitentiary. It has been further noted that the programs which currently exist at this facility to deal with issues of mental health and addictions are woefully inadequate.

THEREFORE we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: To urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to immediately begin work on the planning, designing and construction of a new, modern facility to replace Her Majesty's Penitentiary, which focuses on rehabilitation and provides appropriate programs and services to deal with mental health and addiction issues.

Mr. Speaker, we know in 2008 there was a report that was completed, referred to as *Decades of Darkness*. This report was very important. It outlined the problems with correctional centres in our province, particularly the penitentiary and the inadequacy of mental health services. A decade later in 2018, the government published a report that Marlene Jesso completed on the tragic deaths of inmates at provincial correctional facilities, including the penitentiary. Again, the report pointed out the inadequacy of the facilities and of mental health and addictions treatment services.

It is all well known to us that a large proportion of inmates have mental health and addictions challenges to deal with. These challenges, they've played a role in the actions that brought them to prison; they may play a role in sending people back to prison instead of towards rehabilitation. Clearly, it's in the best interest of all of us to focus our correctional services on rehabilitations.

Our prisons should not serve as asylums for those who need mental health and addictions treatment. Replacing the penitentiary must be complemented by significant reforms in mental health and addictions treatment. A new facility, in and of itself, is not going to address the underlying issues. Better treatment is required at

our new facility, one that is designed for the 21st century and is geared towards rehabilitation rather than mere incarceration.

So, Mr. Speaker, there are many things that we have to consider. The most important thing is helping inmates deal with the circumstances they are in, showing them the possibilities and helping them to begin the journey towards rehabilitation. Let's work as partners to advance work on this important priority.

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: I'm fighting with my colleague from Transportation and Works.

The short answer is that building a new penitentiary is a more complicated endeavour, I'm told, than building a new acute-care hospital. There's \$1.6 million from Transportation and Works going into it.

But I would really like to refer the Member opposite to two documents. One is *Towards Recovery* and the other are around the statements that we made about transitioning health care for inmates into the Department of Health and Community Services. We have already done a gap analysis between the services offered by Eastern Health and those in the penitentiary, and we have the director of health services in corrections within the department working to align those gaps.

We are on track to completely take over health care, physical and mental, in an integrated way for all corrections inmates by the end of this calendar year, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands.

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, I stand again today with a petition on behalf of the people in Western Newfoundland in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

WHEREAS the successful proponents for the new hospital in Corner Brook are scheduled to be announced this spring, with construction anticipated to begin in the fall, and this is estimated to be a four-year construction period, and there are experienced local tradespeople and labourers in the area;

THEREFORE we, the undersigned, petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to encourage companies that are awarded with the contracts for the new hospital to hire local tradespeople and labourers, at no extra cost to the taxpayers, so that they can work in their own area, support the local economy and be able to return home to their families every evening.

Mr. Speaker, once again I stand on behalf of the people that elected me and people who contacted me all throughout the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. I am pleased that the announcement will be made very soon for the new hospital with the radiation unit. That is great news. And also room for the next available technology, PET scan or whatever it may be, that's great news.

So I was encouraged by the Minister of Transportation's comments that he is working with all the interested parties to try to get 90 per cent of local workers hired at the construction site. That's good news. So I commend the minister for working with all the partners on that. I just hope that we can get it done, get it resolved before the construction starts so that we don't have to have people on the protest line asking to have jobs in the local area, driving past while they're going to Port aux Basques. It's an opportunity for us to have great skilled labour in the area, of all Newfoundland and Labrador, a lot in Western Newfoundland, no doubt, to build this hospital.

I've been encouraged on many occasions throughout the whole election, before the election, after the election, that I present these petitions and I will continue to do so on behalf of the people who elected me. I encourage the

government, and I know the minister's working on it, to try to have something resolved before the construction starts so that we can have a smooth construction season with the hospital, and that we can have local people, at ease with their mind, with their families, knowing that they'll be home for the next three to four years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further petitions?

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. LESTER: Mr. Speaker, currently the coverage of Lucentis/Eylea under the NLPDP is being capped at a maximum lifetime of 15 vials. No other province in Canada limits this number of treatments for their patients arbitrarily like this.

Without treatment, patients with ongoing ophthalmic medical conditions that require this treatment are at a very high risk of losing vision. Many patients are losing their vision and are being denied access to appropriate and approved eye care as a result of financial barriers.

THEREFORE, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to remove the cap of 15 vials per lifetime.

Mr. Speaker, I reflect on a tagline on a commercial from years ago. It was by some sort of vision organization and they said: Next to life itself, vision is God's greatest gift. Let's pull the religious aspect of that out, but truly that is the case. Without vision, we would not be able to enjoy the life that we all share.

I have two constituents now that I'm dealing with on two separate occasions which are victims of this financial barrier to treatment that they require to maintain their vision health. These are individuals that are able to operate independently. They live in their own apartments. They look after themselves. They contribute in the volunteer community and now, all of a sudden, because of \$1,700 every three months, their quality of life is going to rapidly

deteriorate and, subsequently, they will become an increased burden on our provincial health care system.

When I look at this limitation being put on this drug coverage, I cannot see how it's a financial benefit to remove an individual's independence and make them become dependent on the health care system for full-time provision of their health care.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

It's a little difficult to hear. Please continue.

MR. LESTER: Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further petitions?

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to call Orders of the Day.

MR. SPEAKER: Orders of the Day, Sir.

Orders of the Day

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to call Order 3, second reading of Bill 1.

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Justice, that Bill 1 be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act. (Bill 1)

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to speak in the House today about an act that we're introducing to the *Revenue Administration Act* that will eliminate the remaining 13 per cent tax on automobile insurance. In *Budget 2019* we were pleased to announce this change, which will be a significant reduction to the tax burden faced by Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

We've spoken at length about the economic climate that forced us to add the original 15 per cent in 2016, and it is not something that anybody on this side of the House wanted to do nor were any of the measures that were necessary in 2016. As we've gone about the business of turning our financial situation around, we've always kept that fact in mind. I've committed on many occasions, as has our Premier, that as we're able to provide tax relief to the people of the province, we would do so.

Last year in *Budget 2018* we reduced the tax from 15 per cent to 13 per cent, effective January 1, 2019. At that time we planned further 1 per cent decreases in 2020, 2021 and 2022. However, this year we recognized that there was some room to make the full change and remove the remaining 13 per cent while remaining on target to return to surplus in 2022-2023.

Obviously, Mr. Speaker, when you ask people in this province what taxes they'd like to see removed, the answer would be all of them. Our job as a government is to determine which taxes will have the widest range and positive impact on the general public while balancing the need to generate revenues to fund important programs and services.

As with so much of what we do, Mr. Speaker, it's about a balanced approach. The balanced approach has kept us focused on the retail sales tax on automobile insurance. Motorists across the province are required to have automobile insurance, and so this tax is one that affected the vast majority of residents over the age of 16 in this province.

Furthermore, automobile insurance rates have an impact on businesses and any business with a company vehicle, and even bigger impact on any business with a fleet of vehicles. So by reducing the tax on automobile insurance we are having a positive impact not just on members of the

public, but also on many businesses across the province. It is for that reason that we have prioritized reducing this tax ahead of others.

Mr. Speaker, now that we are removing the retail sales tax on automobile insurance entirely, the next time we have an opportunity for a similar reduction we will once again balance the potential positive impact on the public with the potential downward impact on our finances and we will make prudent fiscal decisions. Fiscal prudence remains the order of the day for this government. It is something that we speak often with our bond-rating agencies about. It's something that we speak with our lending agencies about.

I recognize that there is a new dynamic in this hon. House, and that we need a collaborative approach in making decisions. I welcome collaboration, but I say to all Members of the House that the people of the province didn't elect a minority government simply so that we could return to the days of reckless spending. They didn't elect a minority government so that other parties could push for tax breaks and spending increases with short-term political popularity gains while leaving tough decisions on how to fund those decisions to the government in power.

They elected us to work together to make the decisions necessary to help our province prosper and to continue to recover from the fiscal crisis that was faced in late 2015 and 2016. For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I ask that in collaborating together that all Members consider the need for balance. We can always discuss new programs, new tax breaks, new tax initiatives, but those discussions need to occur simultaneous to frank and honest discussions about balancing the offering of decreased revenue and increased spending with where the money comes from.

Mr. Speaker, it is not realistic to talk about decreasing revenues for the province and increasing spending in the province without finding where that money is coming from or without returning to a fiscal crisis as we saw in late 2015.

The taxes that are collected by the province, Mr. Speaker, pay for vital services such as health care, education, post-secondary education and

infrastructure. They all come from a combination of tax dollars and provincial revenue. Any discussion around taxes that doesn't recognize this is not realistic.

Mr. Speaker, I'll only take a few more moments as I would like to explain how the change to this elimination of automobile sales tax will roll out. We've received some questions, and I want to make sure that we clarify how this will happen.

We've made the decision to make these changes retroactive to the day that it was first announced by the Premier, which is April 15, 2019. These changes will be finalized once the legislation receives Royal Assent, at which point rebates will be organized and issued to those who've renewed their insurance between April 15 and the date that this comes into legal force.

We've had discussions with the insurance industry and it is understood that the insurance providers will help by providing the rebates to their customers who renew during the interim period, and that government will reimburse the insurance providers. We will work to do this as quickly as possible. Mr. Speaker, passing this legislation is a vital first step to ensuring that people get their tax breaks.

With that, we'll open it for debate.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to stand up and speak on the Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act. I certainly wish that we were talking about more than just simply the elimination of the insurance tax. I remind the minister, if you didn't put it on, you wouldn't have to take it off.

Having said that, the previous Liberal administration in 2015-16 told us they had no choice but to implement a massive tax regime. At the same time, though, as they said they had

no choice to do that, they also committed to a 30 per cent reduction in expenditure. At the same time, the previous Liberal administration have clearly and publicly said we do not have a revenue generation problem, we have an expenditure problem.

Up to 2019-2020, that expenditure problem has not been addressed. We still see the same expenditure in 2019-20 as we saw in 2015-16. So, as a result of that, there have been no major reductions as promised by the previous Liberal administration. Instead of focusing on stimulating the economy, we have focused rather on keeping the taxes in. It's basic economics that says if you want to shrink an economy simply add more taxes. If you want to grow an economy take some of the taxes off. They have failed to do that.

The minister has told us now that he will return to surplus in '22-'23. There is nothing in the budget in '19-'20 that's going to move that target forward. It's about the next three years, and there's a billion dollars worth of savings that the minister has to find over the next three years. Previously, we asked for the details around the billion dollars, \$400 million-and-something in revenue, 617 in expense. We've gotten no details on that, Mr. Speaker.

Again, the minister said they had no choice but to put the taxes on and they couldn't take them off. Well, they had an opportunity during their budget preparations to do more for the people. They brought in additional revenues from the federal government through the offshore agreement. They chose to use those revenues for other priorities. Their priority was not to reduce the tax burden. Their priority was not to put money back into the hands of the people of this province, whether it be insulin pumps, medical transportation, home insurance or child care expenses.

Anything that would've put more money back into the pockets of the people of this province instead of the pockets of government would clearly have helped, but they chose to ignore that. As a result, we will continue to pay an occupancy tax for the next year and we will continue to pay taxes on home insurance, and the people of the province will still be burdened

with all of the other amounts they have to pay out.

So I think, Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day this is a start, but it's not the end. There certainly could have been, should have been a lot more deliberations into their budget and how they decided to spend their money, but we look forward to seeing what next year brings when it comes to expenditure reductions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Again, as I always say, it's a privilege to get up here in the House of Assembly and represent the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis and the people in it.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is something that in 2016 when the budget first was announced that there was an awful outcry in our province, where people were hit with 300 tax increases and also 50 new taxes. There were protests, there were people out on the steps of Confederation Building. Everywhere in my district that I went to people talked about the increase in taxes and how it was going to affect them and how they were going to survive. Small businesses in my area, and other people that I dealt with, had the same concerns. Now we step ahead almost four years later and we see the effect it had on the people of the province.

This is a tax, Mr. Speaker, that's different than a lot of taxes. If I decide to go out and have a meal some night, I'll pay taxes. I know that the tax is something there. It's a choice that I'll make. If I can afford it, then I'll do it. If I want to buy a car or something like that, it's a choice that I make and I'll have to do it. Insurance is something that we all need to have. Now, meanwhile, there are a lot of people out there who don't have it, but it's something we all need to have.

I'll always remember speaking to my next door neighbour when the 2016 budget came in. His

biggest concern at that time was the tax on insurance. What he explained to me – now, he's a senior. Right now, I think he's probably 82 years old. So in his late 70s at the time. And as being a senior, and many seniors in this province, and many people who are on fixed income, what they do, they take what they bring in every month and they calculate it. They take what they spend every month and they calculate it. Those calculations are done on things that are essential for them: their light bill, their telephone bill, their groceries and insurance on their vehicles, insurance on their home.

When you put a 15 per cent increase on that, it had a huge effect on a person who's on a fixed income because that's an increase of a part of that budget that they budget for. Most people – and I always say seniors because they're on fixed incomes, they can tell you right to the dollar what they have to do with their money, whether it's gas, how much gas they spend a week and everything else.

So, here in 2016, along with all these other increases that we put on them; we put 15 per cent on the insurance on their homes and insurance on their vehicles. The burden it cost to those people was unbelievable. Like I said, my neighbour, who, at the time, was in his late 70s, out of the all the increases in taxes, the 300 that they increased, the 50 new ones that they brought in, this was his biggest concern because he had a budget and the effect that that had on their budget was unbelievable.

At the time, we argued here in the House of Assembly, we went back and forth and we discussed it, and I know on this side of the House at the time there was only a few of us, but we all brought up the cost of insurance, the cost that it was having on people. Then government looked at it and they realized, yes, okay, we'll going to give a little bit of relief.

So, last year's budget in 2018, they said we're going to give you a little bit of relief – not right away, but as of January 1, 2019, we're going to take off 2 per cent. Then they were going to do a real big thing for the next – the plan was to take off 1 per cent in 2020, 1 per cent in 2021 and 1 per cent in 2022, but then, Mr. Speaker, all of a sudden, there was an election call. An election call came and government realized that what

we've done to people over the last four years, they're not very happy about it. We have to find some way to get relief to the people of the province because we need their votes.

This would never be done. There would never be 15 per cent. We would've stayed with the 1 per cent, 1 per cent and 1 per cent, but this government said, okay, we need to get the votes of the people, so by buying votes we'll reduce the tax on insurance by 15 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, I heard the Minister of Finance say the people of the province gave us a mandate. They were so close to being the first government ever in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador to be kicked out after one term now that they have a minority government. That's the first time that's ever happened in this province. We've never seen a government in this province that's only been elected one term.

Yes, you got a mandate, but the people of the province have spoken, Minister, and they've spoken to you and said listen here, this wasn't right what you did in 2016. All these increases, all these burdens that you put on people wasn't right, and people have spoken, and they've spoken loudly. I hope the minister and government are listening to the people across the way.

Mr. Speaker, we look at a thing we've spoken about in this House a lot of times and it's one thing that really bugs me. You hear it in the mornings on the news sometimes, and you'll hear about uninsured drivers. I think there are some cases that uninsured drivers are just there because they don't care, they're going to go on and drive and stuff like that. But sometimes uninsured drivers, it's because people really can't afford their insurance. I don't know, I'm wondering if there was an increase in the number of uninsured drivers in this province because of the burden that was put on them on their tax rate. I don't know, but I would assume there was.

A normal person, a thousand dollars, I mean it's another \$150 to pay on your insurance. People don't have that kind of money so I'm wondering how many seniors, how many people in our province took the chance and said I can't afford the insurance; I really can't afford to do it; I got

to keep my lights on; I got to put groceries on the table. So often does that happen?

I spoke a little bit about seniors. In my district, I make a point to attend everything I can to do with seniors 'cause I really appreciate them, and I know most of the people in this House of Assembly appreciate what seniors have done for us. We'd never be in this place if it wasn't for our mothers, our fathers, seniors that paid the price for us through wars and everything else. I know everybody in this House, I'm sure, respects the seniors in the province and what they've done for us. But we put an awful burden on them by increasing these taxes, by putting 15 per cent extra taxes on them to have to pay. Like I said, they're on fixed budgets. It is a fixed budget that they are trying to pay.

We have a duty here as people that make the laws and make the rules and regulations for the province. We have a duty to the people of the province. In 2016, government chose a different route than I would've chosen. I would never have taxed the people to death like they did. I would've never put increases on 300 taxes. I would've never put the burden of 50 new taxes on them. Government should realize the results of what you did was wrong. It didn't work out the way you wanted it to work out.

Your view of adding all these taxes on the people of Newfoundland and Labrador failed because our economy is not in that good of shape. This was supposed to – we had to make these drastic moves so the economy could grow, so that jobs can be created, so that our whole economic outlook would be brighter in the future. Well, Mr. Speaker, after almost four years, is it brighter – is it brighter? No, it's not. No, it's not brighter.

It's not brighter for the people of the province. The people of the province spoke only a short while ago and they spoke to your government and said, listen here, what you did to us in 2016, we can't forgive you for it. That's the reason why we're here with a minority government today. Never before in this province have you ever seen a government lose after one term. Never ever happened, because people give them a chance to do the work; but, in 2016, the choices that you made were too drastic and they

caused a lot of hardship to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We will support this. This is something that we got to be able to support because we need relief. I look forward to government giving more relief to the people of this province – give more relief. As the Minister of Finance or the previous minister of Finance talked about putting their hands in people's pockets, now is time to take your hands out of people's pockets and put a few dollars back in them.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

I just want to speak to this bill very shortly, not for a very long period of time, just to respond to my colleague, the Member for Cape St. Francis. I don't intend on responding to a lot of what he said, the back and forth and the people. I just want to respond to a specific point that he made which was: Did this lead to an increase in uninsured drivers? The answer is no.

My suggestion is that the issues that have led to increased insurance have led to that, which has been coming over a long period of time since, in fact, 2005. We've seen premiums, which are not just a Newfoundland and Labrador issue; it's a Canadian issue, certainly an Atlantic issue, where insurance premiums have increased dramatically. That's been the biggest driver of that.

So I just want to put that out there. There's absolutely no correlation. So again, I'll take my seat at this point. I just wanted to point that out to that specific point and I'll sit down and listen to the rest of the debate.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

MR. FORSEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to get up here and represent the District of Exploits and have a chance to speak

on this bill. The insurance bill, of course, it was expensive for the people of this province, seniors, the working class. Everybody that pays an insurance bill, they know what it's like to be paying this insurance, Mr. Speaker. To cancel the insurance means more money in the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and they need that because we pay too much for tax.

It's more affordable income; it gives more allowable spending. They want to do things they can't afford to do. They're almost confined in their own homes because their insurance is too high. People can't afford to do anything anymore. They'd like to go out and buy a lunch. They'd like to be able to take somebody out for a meal or something like that, but they can't afford to do that. That cuts down on the restaurant business; it, cuts down on other businesses.

Speaking of businesses, I heard the minister and people there talking about this is recreation week. Every recreational vehicle today requires insurance. So you got quads, you got side-by-sides, you got snowmobiles, Sea-Doos, boats, Argos and other recreational items all taxable for insurance. So you take that off – people can't afford to have those items anymore, Mr. Speaker.

I know in our area, in the central part of the province in Exploits, without those vehicles we don't get around sometimes. People are using their vehicles for in around the woods, snowmobiles in the wintertime. That's another recreational business that's afforded from the tax of insurance that they can use this. In our area, small gas stations, the smaller stores, the recreational outlets, everybody can avail of more spending from the savings that we can see from insurances for those individuals.

Mr. Speaker, people need to be able to afford to do that. Nobody wants to see a working fellow work 40 hours a week, come home, I can't do anything. My wife and I can't go anywhere. All we can do is sit in the house, because we either got to pay our light bill this week, we got to pay our fuel this week, we got to buy groceries this week, and we also have to pay our tax on insurance when the insurance bills come up.

So, Mr. Speaker, that is all affordable spending, monies that can be collected from those insurances that makes it easier for living. I've heard it from door to door about the insurances. People just can't afford to do those types of things anymore. They can't afford to take a trip – not a trip down south, anywhere like that, but a trip just in here to St. John's from our area. They can't afford to do that because they don't have the money to allow them to do it. Taking the tax off insurance would certainly alleviate some of those pains.

I did hear someone say about the seniors on fixed incomes. Yes, Mr. Speaker, that becomes a big problem. They're in their own homes the same way. They're wondering if they're going to be able to afford their heat this week or their food this week.

Mr. Speaker, a lot of people, as we went door to door, and we heard it during the campaign, that the taxes are one big issue that the people didn't want in this province. Of course, they gave us the reasons why they didn't want it. They showed us on election day what they wanted and what they didn't want. They certainly didn't want to be paying taxes.

So, Mr. Speaker, to see some of that alleviation off the insurance will be great. We'd like to see the full part of the insurance tax gone, but I guess we'll have to wait for another day.

With that, it leaves money for young families probably to build their families a little bit more, be able to afford to get more stuff for children, to be able to feed them, give them better, healthy foods. I know even on the campaign, like people were saying I can't afford to have the healthy food, the bananas, the apples, the oranges. Because of the tax increases today, we got no money to be able to do that stuff. That might even help them to live a bit healthier, maybe cut down on their health costs in the long run. A savings on the insurance, it certainly helps to put money in various other sectors.

Mr. Speaker, people need to be able to afford some recreation. They want to be able to do things that they couldn't do before. The insurance monies and all those taxes really places a burden on all our society, every one of us.

The working class are the ones spending the money. They say we're paying a lot of taxes. We got two cars, we got a boat and we got a Ski-Doo. We got all that kind of stuff, so we're paying more taxes. They'd like to have those vehicles and have those recreational items. That's where our economy grows from that, because of those younger people who are spending the money in our society today and keeping this province – that are spending the money.

Then, like I say, the elderly, the seniors who are after paying their way for us, they deserve a break on the insurance, Mr. Speaker. They don't need to be saying we can't afford groceries this week. They need a break, too.

It can give us a lot of affordable spending that we can put in other directions to keep this province flowing moneywise, to keep spending, to keep people doing what they want to do. That is a good start with the tax on the automobile but, like I say, we'd like to see more because we need more affordable spending, Mr. Speaker. There's not one person in this province who wouldn't like to say, I want to do this, I want to go here, I want to go there. I heard it every day at the doors. I really did.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll look forward to having another say on another bill on another day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

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

It's a privilege, of course, to rise in this House and speak to this bill. I certainly can't dispute that it's a good move. While campaigning recently, this was certainly one of the issues that was raised at the door. Even as recent as yesterday, I had my neighbour ask me about the tax on auto insurance.

I think when we look at what the Minister of Finance talked about, he talked about a balanced approach. He talked about the impact this would

have on businesses and the public, which, again, you can't dispute. Any time you eliminate a tax, it has to have a positive impact.

He also talked about prioritizing and eliminating taxes over others, and he talked about a balanced and positive impact. He talked about fiscal prudence being the order of the day. Again, it's not something we can dispute. But to talk about it and to implement it and to address it is a different matter.

When you look at the mandate, or call it the mandate or whatever, when you have 57 per cent of those who voted, who didn't vote for you, I believe that tells a story. When you got 43 per cent of the voting population that have voted for you, that's not a majority; 50 per cent plus one would be a majority. So that's telling. I think in all the districts and all the doors that we went to – and I say we, all 40 Members, we're getting the same message. There's no way we didn't get the same message. The same message is: We're taxed to death. They talk about mitigation for Muskrat Falls, of which there is a \$200 million dollar figure somewhere that's going to happen, occur. So, we hear all these things and they can't be ignored. The garbage tax is another one people talk about; the 1.6 kilometre.

So when I go back to prioritizing and eliminating items over others, we've been told at the doors what the public want, what the public need and we've offered to co-operate on putting a new budget forward, for making adjustments to budgets. I don't think anyone over here mentioned cut, slash, burn – not mentioned over here at all.

I do appreciate where such comments may come from in terms of well, if you got to make it up somewhere, you got to get it from somewhere else. We agree with that statement but we're not talking about cutting, just going out slashing and burning. We're talking about what the minister actually said: prioritizing; being prudent how we do this; having a balanced approach.

That's all we're asking over here is when – eliminating tax on auto insurance, they were going to eliminate bit by bit but certainly they're heard what the public have asked for and they eliminated it, carte blanche, gone. Hopefully

they'll do the same with the levy and get rid of that right away.

At the end of the day, we have to look at what the people of the province want. We know the budget that went through. I mean, over the years, the history – all governments come out with an election budget. I don't think it's ever happened where one came out where we couldn't debate it, but that's another story. So we can't be offering and going out and offering this and that, \$200 million here or \$129 million for infrastructure, \$40 million for low carbon economy programs. I'm not disputing that they're not needed or they're not valuable, but there's a whole shopping list of what the public have asked us to do.

We have an opportunity now. No one expects you to come in and drop all these items down in a year or in a few months. Every plan that comes out by government is, in this particular instance, we're going to hit a balanced budget in 2022-2023. We know that doesn't happen overnight. We know you have to do that. But we have an opportunity here now to take what the public have told us. We basically have a census done.

We all went banging on doors; we heard from everyone what they want, what they don't want. This is an opportunity to take what we heard at the doors now and apply it to the budget. Maybe not the current budget – no one's expecting that to happen. But we know in two or three, four months all the departments will be sharpening their pencils and probably their erasers and they will be getting down to the brass tacks of looking at what we need in a budget moving forward, department by department.

Then we'll go to the public – we'll have public consultations maybe in January. But we've already done that. We've gone out; we know what the public want. It should be fresh in all our minds as we go forward and talk about this. And we get it in reports that we get. We talked about the Goss Gilroy report that's out there. You did not need a crystal ball – and I agree with the minister on it that up to that point it's probably anecdotal information, but there's been many studies done on it.

But the greater percentage of the population out there, their prime, prime driver for them staying

in this province is jobs – long-term, permanent, meaningful jobs. And if they leave the province, it's for jobs. If they leave the province, it's following the spouse or partner who got a good job. If they leave, they're following someone else. When they leave, grandparents, kids, they all leave with them. So then you look at our declining population. Our tax base – that's our tax base going down. We should be trying to work as hard as we can to get more people working and paying less taxes than having less people here and pay more taxes.

If you look at the data – and I'll specify the data because myself and the minister have had discussions on whether to use seasonally adjusted or unadjusted data – take the data from last month, statistics on May month. So year over year unadjusted data, from this May to last May, we are the only province that has a declining labour force – declining labour force. Now we may be creating jobs over here, 300, but we lose 400 over here. Yes, we've created jobs, but we've lost jobs. We have to get our labour force up and we have to get them out working. You look at the data again, no surprise to anyone. Our unemployment rate is the highest in the country; our immigration rates, the lowest in the country; our fertility rates are dropping; our aging population is just going up immensely.

So we have to work on creating the environment – government doesn't create jobs. That's not our job. Our job is to create the environment to allow businesses to create jobs. And I agree with the Minister of Finance when he talks about eliminating this tax will help businesses, but there's far more that we have to do – far more. When you look at the reports we get and you hear it at the door, jobs, jobs and jobs are there high up on the list.

Taxation is next, and there are so many forms of taxation that we need to address. This is one we're addressing, one of many. In my district, the garbage tax they call it, how much is charged for cabin owners to have their garbage collected, some want it and some don't want it. These are all charges that we need to look at. I'm telling you, when you're dealing with individuals like an aging population like us – this is seniors' month, you talk about seniors on a fixed income. We may not be really drastically affected by a tax because we're making an income, but some

of these seniors on fixed incomes, every small percentage affects them.

So, I totally support this tax reduction, but I have to say that we have a long way to go. We have an opportunity to make some changes here, to make some fixes, not immediately, but moving forward we all know what we heard at the doors, we need to take what we heard at the doors and we need to make real changes in going forward with this budget.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I distinctly remember when this tax was put in place. Friends of mine, close friends of mine came to me, with no political stripe, no more interest in government and they were very, very adamant when they said to me this tax is an attack on the middle class. They were distressed by it. They thought it was an unconscionable burden placed on them.

In particular, it was a particularly hard burden for anyone who, perhaps, was operating a small business, that used extra vehicles, or households that have more than one vehicle, or households with young drivers who perhaps are using that vehicle to go to further their education and post-secondary. They were absolutely disturbed by the fact that this tax was an attack on the middle class. It was very concerning for them.

This is very nice to see now that the repeal of this tax goes to one of the fundamental platforms of the New Democrats, which is to improve affordability for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. In particular, in the face of rising costs, in the face of the expected or anticipated rise in electricity rates that we're going to see from Muskrat Falls, in the face of increases in the consumer price index which means that every day things like buying groceries or filling up our gas tanks, let alone running our vehicles, is going to become more expensive. So recognizing that affordability for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador is paramount

removal of this tax will present quite a relief for individuals.

We have seen there's been a great deal of debate around the insurance industry. Certainly, one of the concerns about this proposed bill we have is, how will the clause associated with anyone who would cancel their insurance immediately after having insurance, cancelling their insurance right after that, how would they be enforced if they are cancelling their insurance immediately after paying it. We have some questions around the logistics of that. Certainly, I'd like to see how the minister will address that, but we do look forward to ensuring that all drivers on our roads are insured and insured at reasonable rates.

This also dovetails into the highway enforcement act. Of course, we are very concerned about the safety of our roads and the integrity of our roads as well. So as we see improvements in the highway safety act, as well as enforcement of the highway safety act, we are going to see our individuals becoming safer on the roads as well as having slightly more affordability.

In addition to that, we are very concerned about road conditions in the province. Certainly, Newfoundland and Labrador has seen a substantial number of roads that have been on the top 10 list of worst roads in the province. In having some of the worst roads in the province, that means you are much more likely to have suffered damage to your vehicle, which can mean your deductible is lost on your vehicle; or, if you make an additional insurance claim associated with the bad roads, that will drive up your rates as well.

We are also very aware that Newfoundland and Labrador has some of the highest insurance rates in Canada. One of the things that I'm quite concerned about is increasing in those rates as well. So it's certainly improving the safety of our roads and improving the ability for individuals to drive on those roads and not have damage on their vehicles is a very, very important piece.

We know government is taking steps to lower the cost of insurance, and the Public Utilities Board has been involved in a heated debate about insurance premiums. In fact, many of

those exchanges between the Insurance Board of Canada and a group of personal injury lawyers that form the Insult to Injury campaign that sought to protect accident victims did result in the PUB being released from its duties on January 29 and that committee was still in divide at that time. So, obviously, this is something very important to a great many people and it's very near and dear to absolutely everyone in the province.

We are very acutely aware of the importance of access to personal vehicles for individuals, because we do not have a public transportation system available to everyone in the province. So until we get to that point where we are able to offer a public transportation system to everyone in the province, we want to ensure that everybody has reasonable access to a vehicle that is thoroughly insured so that we can shore up public safety for the individuals driving, as well as the individuals who may be involved in an accident inadvertently along the way.

Government has offered a number of lists of measures to stabilize the rising cost of insurance which increases our current deductible from \$2,500 to \$5,000 for bodily injury claims. While that is reasonable and may lower the cost, it does of course present a little problem for individuals who will have to pay that deductible. So that is disconcerting as well. It is very nice to see that, though, we are eliminating that tax. If I were to go back and talk a little bit about the rising cost of insurance, I'd like to expand that a little bit more to not only car insurance but also home insurance.

I'm not sure if anyone is familiar with Mark Carney, who is currently the Governor of the Bank of England, but he has done a number of talks on the implications of climate change. In particular, one of which is trapped assets, which I'd love to have a conversation with, when we talk about trapped asset in terms of using our oil resources and the possibility of actually having those trapped in the ground, but today to concentrate on some of the implications of why we might have those trapped assets is climate change is a substantial and significant issue facing our province.

Mark Carney, in many of his addresses, has pointed out that hundred-year storms are going

to happen more and more frequently. In fact, they may happen on 10-year intervals. That's just a rough estimate of how regular that will happen.

More importantly, with the rising incidence of significant weather events, whether that be hurricanes or flood waters or winter weather storms or any other weather event that leaves a destruction to property, means that our insurance rates, our insurance companies and our insurance plans have to pay out for those damages. So as the number of storms happen and as the damage becomes more substantial, we're going to see more and more insurance claims, and as those insurance claims continue, our premiums will continue to go up and up and up.

We have a far more significant issue associated with that, because we cannot live in a society where our homes and our property are vulnerable to the weather and acts of God, and we are no longer insured by those. So people will be reluctant to purchase homes, to purchase insurance. The way in which they construct their homes is going to have to be reconsidered as well.

While the removal of the tax on insurance is a very reasonable and preliminary step in the affordability of insurance, I think that it is only scratching the surface on some of the costs that we are going to see imposed on the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and the implications for affordability in our province. So we really need to be cognizant of what those implications are and what we, as government, can do to improve the lives of individuals in the face of this uncertainty.

Again, this is a very preliminary measure. It is a good measure, I am certain. I will go back and talk to the individuals that spoke to me and told me that the imposition of this tax was an attack on the middle class. I will go back to them and very happily tell them that that tax is being removed, but I will also make sure they are aware that there are some other things that we need to continue to lobby for.

I will certainly make sure that the people of St. John's East - Quidi Vidi are very well informed that this tax has been removed and how they can

go about claiming the rebate, if they have paid their tax between the time that this bill has been enacted and when that was originally announced on April 15.

So, as we are very aware, people do have a need to own a vehicle. It is paramount that they be able to afford that vehicle and afford to be able to operate that vehicle, but also be able to insure that vehicle because public health and public safety is absolutely vital as well.

While I commend the minister for repealing this tax, and I will support this bill, I do think that we are only scratching the surface on the need and importance of lowering our insurance costs. I think, creatively and collaboratively, we need to find a solution to rectify the situation, lest we all be stuck in a situation where we cannot afford our insurance, or we are left with a home that has been destroyed by weather that is no longer insured. That is going to put us all in a much more difficult position.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm just going to stand and speak on this for a few minutes. It's good news for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. I know the insurance itself for automobile, house and properties is rising on many occasions.

I don't want to shirk away from this also, Mr. Speaker. I was part of the government that brought in that decision. The reason why is that we were so much in debt at the time and we were almost bankrupt. These were the kinds of decisions that we had to make. No one wanted to make them – absolutely no one wanted to make them. I was sitting around the table and we all went through all of our options. One thing we did say is that we will repeal this as quickly as we can and the Minister of Finance has done that the first opportunity.

When you're looking at possible bankruptcy of the province –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. JOYCE: You can't hear me? The Minister of Finance says he can't hear me. The first time that ever happened. But, Mr. Speaker, when you're looking at almost bankruptcy in the province and there's a possibility of not even paying day-to-day bills, there had to be tough decisions made. There had to be. No one wanted to make those tough decisions – absolutely no one.

I'm very pleased that the government lived up to the commitment that it would be taken off at the first opportunity. I do not want to shirk away to say that the government is bad for bringing it in. I was a part of it. I take responsibility for it. I definitely stood with the government at the time. I agreed to the decision at the time because of the financial situation that we were in.

If we just look at the Muskrat Falls inquiry, just think about the money there, when it went from 6.2. When we were in Opposition here, we said there's no way it's going to remain at that. We said from Gate 1, to Gate 2, to Gate 3 decisions that they were wrong. We said taking out the PUB was wrong. Those decisions back then are why the government at the time had to make the very tough decisions in 2016.

If you look at just one issue at the Muskrat Falls inquiry, just one, the \$300 million increase, overnight. Just think about it. Do we know what you need to bring that measure in for the income tax, just that alone? That we said was going to happen. We had a filibuster here, almost five days, on the Muskrat Falls. We begged the government at the time. We did everything possible. We tried to work with them. We asked to bring it back to the PUB.

We said it couldn't work, and it never. We were right – we were right. I know most of the Members in this House on the Opposition side were not here, so I exclude the Members here, I'm just talking about at the time. So this is not on the PC Party, this is just on the government at that time, because some Members weren't here and you had no responsibility. So I just want to make that clear also.

But at the time when we stood back here and we were going through this I think it was 4½, 5 days – I think one of the longest filibusters, if not the longest in the province. We were saying that we

can't afford Muskrat Falls. There were cheaper options. The demand forecast was off. When you remove the PUB, the governing body from it, we're going to have complications and we're going to have problems, which we did have. Then we said that the decision gates we never had all the information. We said all that. We, as the Opposition, and I know the premier, at the time, was leading the charge with us. I stand by that that he did lead the charge with all of us.

I remember the night the filibuster ended. I remember the night we were out in the caucus room. As the Opposition, by the time the filibuster ended, I think it was 4:30, 5 at night, that day, there were three of us sat down, we did up a press release saying that any excess sales outside the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, we committed then to put it back in for rate mitigation to the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. That was done 4:30 in the morning. That's how committed we were and the government at the time to do it.

So at the time, a lot of decisions that were made around Muskrat Falls, the government, which I was a part of, would not have been in the position that they were in. And it's tough at the time when you come in in 2015 and have a budget in 2016 and you have to make tough decisions.

I remember a quote, and I always remember this. It was Clyde Wells. It was back in 1992 and there was a big fuss going on with the teachers, and some of the teachers with their long memories can remember this in 1992. It was the fall of 1992 and we're going into the election in 1993 and then he was rolling back and the teachers were next and they had a very frank discussion that he was doing it. And a lot of people were upset. A lot of people were upset at the time, saying that we're going to lose the election.

I remember Clyde Wells – and then he came to me at the time, because I was very close to him and I spent a lot of time with him. They said: Can you talk to them? I remember driving out to Gillams with Clyde Wells – this is why I have so much respect for the man. I said a lot of people are concerned what's going to happen here. You're making a tough decision. I remember him looking at me, he said: Eddie, I rather lose

with honesty than win with dishonesty. That's what Clyde Wells said at the time to me. That makes so much sense.

So when we were in government at the time in 2015 and the books was presented to us, we could have sugar-coated that and pushed it down the road, but the government at the time, which I was a part of, said no, we can't. We got to make tough decisions. We apologized. I did on many occasions to the residents saying that I wish we didn't have to do it. We wish we didn't have to do it, but we had to face reality, and the reality was that we were almost bankrupt.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at why we're doing this today, we had to put it all in relative terms when you go back in 2011, 2012, 2013 with some decisions that were made that put Newfoundland and Labrador in such a bankrupt position and the decisions that were made there weren't thought out, they were never – and then we hear it now at Muskrat Falls inquiry how much politics was involved with it.

Instead of making the right decision, demand forecast was off, the cost was off, the timing was off when we were going to have first power, all of that is what we all knew at the time. So I commend the government and I commend the Minister of Finance for bringing this in because there was a commitment. The minister at the time wasn't even in the Cabinet; he was the Speaker I think at the time when that decision was made. It was a government decision that we would bring it back, eliminate it at the first opportunity and the government did. I got to recognize that.

I apologize to the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. It was a tough decision at the time, but it was a decision that we took it on the chin at the time to make because we had to make it. I remember Clyde Well's words: I'd would rather do it with honesty than with dishonesty and pass it on down the road. So, Minister, I'm glad that it was brought forward today. I will be supporting this bill and I just want to put in context of why it had to be done.

I heard the Leader of the Third Party talking about the mitigation and the climate change, and that's so true. That is so true with a lot of

damages across. It's just not here. It's all across Canada, all across the US, all across the world, but we're just a microcosm. When you have Newfoundland and Labrador and we can see the disasters that happened over a number of years and someone brought up Igor today – Igor is something we never seen before. That is such a phenomenon in Newfoundland and Labrador, the damage that that caused.

Again, this is where I have to give some credit to the federal government in part of their disaster mitigation, some that cover size and some of the projects you can increase by 15 per cent to help with current changes in the weather patterns. So when the Leader of the Third Party brings up about climate change and how we have to start looking at new ideas and how we're going to handle this, if not the insurance rates will go so high that a lot of us won't be able to afford it, and that is so true.

This is part of not just the Government of Newfoundland over here, this is a part of all of us here through new ideas and green ideas that we can create a new economy. The federal government also is a big part of it. When you see the fires out west, that firefighters said we'd never ever seen before, this is all part of the insurance package all throughout.

I know the government and the Minister of Municipal Affairs is working with communities and municipalities to help with flood mitigation and other opportunities. So I just want to recognize that what the Leader of the Third Party said is so true. We need to work on that collectively, not just pointing fingers, all of us together to come up with ideas for it.

So I will be supporting the bill. I will be explaining to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador how they can get their rebates.

I remember when we passed the budget, I went out and gave a speech probably two nights later. I took it on the chin. I went out and said, look, here's why we had to do it. Some people may not like what you did, but I think when it happened and when you run the following election and win by 70 per cent as an independent, people respected you for what you did. So I don't shirk from it one bit. I wish I didn't have to do it, but I am so proud that the

government did follow through on the commitment to eliminate it.

I will be supporting the bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Certainly, it's a pleasure once again to have the opportunity to speak this time on Bill 1, An Act to Amend the Revenue Administration Act. Of course, what we're talking about here is repealing the retail sales tax on automobile insurance.

Now, Mr. Speaker, obviously, this is something I would be absolutely familiar with because this was imposed in 2016 and I guess the events of 2016 and the budget is what kind of shaped my political direction from that point forward to where I find myself today.

I will say, Mr. Speaker, at the time – and I'm not going to get into harping on *Budget 2016* and all the taxes and fees. It's ancient history; it happened. There have been explanations given on both sides and different perspectives as to why it happened.

I certainly respect what my colleague for Humber - Bay of Islands said, and I would agree with him that there was nobody who wanted to raise taxes. Let's face it, what government in their right mind, what politician in their right mind would want to raise taxes.

For me, at the time, and I maintained at the time – I still maintain to this day – it wasn't about the fact that I did not recognize there was a need. It wasn't the fact that I didn't realize from a financial point of view that we were definitely on the down trend. Certainly, the price of oil, as we know, the bottom dropped out of her. I will disagree, to some degree, with my colleague for Humber - Bay of Islands about the cause of it.

There's no doubt that the Muskrat Falls Project – which I voted for, by the way, in good faith,

and I've said that many, many times. I don't shirk away from that either, because I did. With the exception of the equity stake that was going to go into it, regardless of whether it ballooned or not, the real effects of Muskrat Falls is yet to happen because it's all loans that are going to come due in the next year or two.

What really got us in the mess, to my mind, as I look back – if hindsight is 20/20 – but when you look back, it was really the fact that the bottom dropped out of her in terms of oil, and the fact that when times were good and the money was flowing like water in this province – we had that period of probably eight to 10 years where there was lots of revenue coming in – that as fast as it was coming in we were spending it. That's what really happened.

I've heard Members in the past talk about what road wouldn't you have paved and what building wouldn't you have built, what school and so on. It's not the capital that did it. It was the operational. It was hiring more programs, more programs, more programs and more staff. We've seen the size of the public service expanded to – I'm not sure what the percentage, but I heard someone tell me something like 30 per cent expansion, 40 per cent.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. LANE: The minister said 50 per cent.

MR. OSBORNE: From 40,000 to 49,000.

MR. LANE: There you go. From 40,000 to 49,000 employees.

Of course, once you take on that responsibility for salaries and so on, then it's not like a capital project. It's not like saying, well, we built five schools this year. Next year we don't have as much money, we'll build two schools. Once you take them on, you have them for good. That's an ongoing commitment, which is why the government is now engaged in this attrition plan, which I absolutely support. I think that's really what got us to the point that we reached, but there was no doubt at the time that something had to be done.

I debated in this House at the time, even though I voted against the budget, I did say at the time I

recognize that something had to be done. What I kept hearing from people in my district, and other Members at the time did as well, was a case of too much, too fast. That's what we heard. It was too much to be dumped on us all at the one time, with the fees and the taxes and the levy.

The levy was the big one. I'm glad to see the levy will be gone after this year, which was – in fairness, it was put in the budget at the time that it would phase out over four year or five years or whatever it was. So after this year that will be one. The gas tax is now gone. The 16½ minus – and, of course, the 4½ back on with the carbon tax. So really it's 12 cents down from what was done at the time.

The levy will be gone, and now we're going to see the insurance tax on vehicles gone; albeit, the homeowners insurance will remain. I believe the homeowners insurance, according to the minister in Estimates this morning, that was going to net us about \$50 million or thereabout. So if we were to cut that right now, that would be another \$50 million in the hole so to speak that we would be going right now. He did commit that as things improved that will be removed, hopefully, as well.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, there's nobody who wants to pay more taxes, not one of us. At the end of the day, what happened, happened. Obviously, there were a lot of people that were very upset that disagreed with it; a lot of people, like I said, in my district that thought it was just too much, but I guess it's ancient history at this point.

Right now, what we're talking about is removing some of the tax that was put on, and I think it will be very welcomed by the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. I'm sure it's going to be welcomed by small business because one of the concerns that was raised at the time, that I raised and other colleagues raised at the time, was that we felt it would impact small business. I believe it did impact small business in terms of restaurants and bars and things like that, because people just didn't have the expendable income.

So it definitely had an impact. Not to mention the fact of consumer confidence and consumer spending, because a lot of people were just not

feeling good. We went through a period of time where we were feeling good about ourselves and things were chugging along. That did have a huge impact on the economy because of consumer confidence, and people were making renovations to their homes and they were building new homes and all that type of activity was occurring. I really do believe that that's going to rebound. I really do. I mean, it's not all doom and gloom. We can all preach doom and gloom. I'm sure there are Members who accuse me from time to time, but I try to live in reality. I'm not trying to paint a negative picture or a rosy picture, but a realistic picture.

I really do believe, though, that things are starting to turn around a bit. You're starting to see it. I think, as time goes on, things will improve and our economy will get better. As that happens, I think government needs to consider waiving even more taxes where they can to put more money in people's pockets. Because, generally speaking, when we're talking about taxing the average person – I'm not talking big corporations and so on, but when you're talking about taxing the average person, guess what? Every dollar that I don't pay in tax, I'm likely going to spend it somewhere. I'm going to spend it on renovations. I'm going to spend it at a restaurant.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. LANE: Someone said you're going to spend it on George Street – yes, I may spend a couple of dollars down there, too. That's all good, people got to work down there too.

AN HON. MEMBER: You're going to put in the bank with the rest of your money.

MR. LANE: Yes, one Member said I'm going to put it in the bank with the rest of my money. It's going to be pretty lonely in that account. But, Mr. Speaker, the more that we can do to cut taxes I think that it will help the economy when we can do that.

So with that said, I will be supporting Bill 1. I can't imagine that anybody on either side of the House wouldn't support this. I would say, though, to the minister, to the government, that while we're concentrating on revenues, while we're concentrating on taxes, we also need to

keep focused on the expense side of the equation. We need to stay focused on the expense side of the equation.

I know there has been some work done, which I've acknowledged already when I've spoken in the past. There has been some good work done on the attrition plan. I think that is good. I think the zero-based budgeting approach is a good thing; the consolidation of government services and getting rid of leased space, selling off of old assets, old schools and so on that is costing us money.

Those are all good things and we need to continue down that road of seeking savings wherever we can, while maintaining crucial, critical public services. But where we can find efficiencies, where we can utilize technology and other things to make our operations more efficient to save money, then I think that's really something that there needs to be a strong focus on doing. And I encourage government to do that.

With that said, Mr. Speaker, as I've already indicated, I will be supporting Bill 1.

Thank you.

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

MR. LESTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate everybody's comments and I also will be supporting this bill. When we apply taxes to anybody or any economy, as has been said over and over again by various Members throughout this hon. House, we are reducing individuals, families and businesses ability to spend in the economy and thus stimulate the economy. That is where our financial solutions come from, being able to stimulate and spend in our economy. When we reach into anybody's pocket and remove money, that's money they don't have to spend the next stop they make. That's what has basically been happening.

There's no doubt, in 2015, with the challenges of a resource-based revenue stream largely on oil that faced the past and past governments, and the incoming government, that was horrendous. But when I look back at that – and I've said this

time and time again – in 2015 I was really happy where I was. I was a farmer. I still am a farmer, by the way. And I was really enjoying working alongside my family on my farm and watching my children take an interest in our business, but I could not sit by and accept that we were going to change government at a time when there was no doubt government needed to change how they governed, but a change in government was going to be disastrous for our economy.

Every time a government changes, you have that steep learning curve. Ideally, governments will come in with a solid plan. But I could see in 2015 there was no solid plan. We were electing a government because it was their turn and that's been a historic failure of our province that we so often un-elect a government versus elect a new government. We need to start, from a transition point from one government to the other, have some continuity of service and have some continuity of fiscal management because, without it, it costs the citizens of this province an incredible amount of money.

I often refer to an adage that my grandfather professed to me. It's no sense in changing horses in mid-stream. Basically, we were in a financial change. We were in a position where our finances had gone from the high profitability of the oil industry to the general global downturn. And not only were we affected by what was happening in our own economy, this global downturn and reduction in oil revenues also affected the ability of our people who worked abroad and transited back and forth, bringing home their paycheques, spending in the economy. That also was another multiplier of our fiscal situation.

How the administration of the time approached that fiscal deficit is why we are still struggling and falling to our knees in our economy today. Yes, there had to be rash decisions made – not rash. I guess you could say rash is never a good thing because rash decisions lead to financial failure. They lead to the collapse of economies. They lead to the disparity between the classes of society, and the middle class are most susceptible to those disparities.

What had to happen was instead of the government coming in and burdening the people with tax and taxation and reducing their

disposable income to spend in the economy, we needed government to come in and say, hey, look, let's grab the bull by the horns and we're going to drag this bull right through this time. We're not going to pull money out of your pocket. It may have taken a little bit of additional borrowing to get us through that rough space, but I can guarantee you now if we did not burden our people with those taxes at that time, we'd be in a far better place.

What happened, Mr. Speaker, was not only people who were already just scraping by had less money to spend; they had to come up with that. They had to come up with that by cutting out purchases, cutting out investment in the economy, cutting out investment in business, even people who had disposable income zipped up their pocketbooks. Those are the people who had money to spend. They stopped spending it because the threat of taxes. The threat of taxes means you're putting out more of your hard-earned money, more of your suavely earned money for no extra services, basically just to cover up the spending issues that we have within government.

The spending issues that we have within government haven't just started with this administration, it's basically been since we've become part of this country. We have spent beyond our means and now all this is coming to a crux where we're almost at the point we're not going to be able to borrow any more, and the interest that we pay on this money that we borrowed is now rivaling some of our most basic but high-priority spending issues.

When we look at \$1.3 billion – while I stand to be corrected – of debt service, that is absolutely astronomical. That almost rivals our deficit. So why is it that we continue to look at more revenue generation by taking tax money out of the people's pockets? This is a very small step in what we need to do.

We also need to look at homeowners' insurance. *Budget 2016* cost the average, middle-class family about \$5,000 to \$6,000. Now there's a difference of opinion on that as to whether that's an exact figure, but in talking to families in my district, that's what they're saying: \$5,000 to \$6,000 per year. I'll tell you one thing, that's a

lot of economic stimulation that could've been happening out of that \$5,000 or \$6,000.

Through my farming occupation, I deal with a fair number of restaurants, small businesses, and every one of them are feeling the pinch. Every one of them are seeing that extra money that was floating around that was allowing businesses to expand and plan for the future is not there. Right now, people and businesses are largely just hoping to get through to the next day, the next pay period, whatever it may be. That's where we have to look. We have to do more. Taxation is not a way to stimulate an economy. It only covers up extended spending that we all in this hon. House have agreed needs to be brought under control.

So where do we start? Where do we start by bringing our spending under control? Number one, we have to get better bang for our buck. We have to start looking at every individual department. While it's been done over and over, over this administration, the past administration, we really have to take heed to what decisions need to be made, regardless of the political consequence. We have to look at fiscally responsible and practical approaches to how government operates and provides services that we, as citizens of this province, so desperately depend on.

When I even look at our own agriculture industry, there is potential there. There's huge potential there in the agriculture industry because food is one of the most essential items in our economy. We all need food, we all need to eat no matter what stage of growth we're at, what health we're in, we all need food. So yes, there's opportunity there. But is the profitability there?

That's basically why we've seen our agriculture production decline. Our agriculture production, with the exception of the supply-managed industries, in which they have the ability to control the price that they get for their product, those industries, the eggs, the dairy and the chicken, they're largely successful but they are faced with their challenges as well because under the current formulas, they are not able to respond quick enough with requested price increases while the cost of production is going up, so they're also feeling the pinch.

Also, we have the threat of increased infiltration by products from south of the border that have been just recently allowed into our country through the give-and-take process of the NAFTA renegotiation or whatever they want to refer to it as.

I often look at my children and I think: What kind of a world are they going to come into? Here we are in our province and we've largely based our future fortunes on a commodity that globally is under pressure to be reduced in consumption. So how are we as a province going to be able to counteract that? Are we on such a small scale going to be able to counteract the global pressure for the commodity that we are basing our future on?

In a business what we would look at is say well, we got to start acting quicker. We have to start investing in other opportunities, investing in more sustainable activities because not only is this commodity of oil and hydrocarbon harvest becoming more pressured to be replaced by more technology, it will be. It will be replaced by it.

Right now in China there are more goods and services transported by electricity than there is by fossil fuels. They have transport trucks, tractor-trailers that we would see rolling down our highway with big fuel tanks on, now they have batteries – much more efficient on the environment, very reliable, longer range. That type of technology is coming our way. That type of technology will replace the demand for oil. So while we have this huge resource off our shores, maybe we should do as the Member for the Third Party had referred to: Look at that as a captured asset and capitalize on some of those captured assets as our contribution to the low-carbon economy.

The Member for Humber - Bay of Islands referred to Clyde Wells and his admiration for Clyde Wells. That's something that he and I share in common. I also admire Clyde Wells and I think that was kind of a pivotal point for our province to stand on its feet or at least get off its knees and start to rise up to our place where we truly belong in Confederation.

During the Meech Lake Accord while it wasn't the direct action of Clyde Wells that defeated

that accord, it was his stand, as far as I'm concerned, against the federal government that encouraged others to respond to that call. That's something we see here today that we need to do today. When our partners, our other oil-based economies such as Alberta and Saskatchewan go to the federal government to speak in opposition to build C-69, we need to be able to band with those individuals, those provinces. Yes, our differences may exist, but the concept of preserving our ability as a province to manage our own resources and make sure that our resources are being developed without the hindrance of federal bureaucracy, that is something that all provinces can share.

That's something that all provinces should be able to proudly band together and collectively pressure our federal government. We have to do it. We have to make sure that our oil industry, our offshore industry is the most competitive in the world because, if not, we are going to be replaced by somewhere else. We're going to be replaced by a more competitive market.

Yesterday I had an opportunity to have a presentation from some individuals and they basically provided a chart of the environmental process that an oil project, just for exploratory drilling, has to go through. In our province it's upwards of almost 700 days. In the UK, it's 18 days. In Australia, it's less than 50. So as a business person, I could see definitely where I'd be investing my money in exploration. It would not be here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

And it shames me to have to stand here in this House and say that. It shames me that why are we, once again, becoming victims to initiatives by the federal government to look socially popular in the environmental world. Why are we having to pay for it?

It's the same thing when it comes to our designation of ocean protected areas. Yes, I am definitely for that type of activity. I am definitely for the preservation of our endangered spaces. But, hey, listen, if we're taking our assets and offering them up for view of the country, for the initiative of the country, we have to be justly compensated for it.

So that's where, when you look at the funding scheme for the country, when you look at

transfer payments, why are we still at the bottom of this? Why are we still ineligible for transfer payment when yet, as a province, we continue to offer so much to this country? Be it in our environmental perception of what the federal government is doing to preserve spaces and the protect the environment, or what we're doing to lead the way in industry development; what we're doing in the way of providing the rest of country with highly skilled and educated workers who are fantastic; second-to-none educational facilities which are largely subsidized by the taxpayers of this province. All of that plays a part in our contribution to the country. All of that is what has to be taken into consideration.

Government can send out a message of prosperity, of potential, and the people will rise to that prosperity and potential, such as what happened to Saskatchewan in the mid-'90s. Basically, Saskatchewan was on the same type of fiscal cliff as what we found ourselves in the past, say, four or five years. What happened was the government went to the feds and they said, look, we can't make our payments. The feds said, well, you got to. Go back and figure out a way.

So the legislators of Saskatchewan got together and said, how can we do this? How can we inspire our people to rise to the challenge? We won't speak of bankruptcy, we won't speak of fiscal insolvency, and we won't speak of bouncing cheques when it comes to our civil service. We'll say, hey, listen, people of our province, we got a challenge we have to rise to, and we'll do it. We'll get through it.

It took a little bit of money to borrow upfront, but look where Saskatchewan is today. They are continually rising in the level of paying down their debt. Their economy is continuing to move. Their economy has rebounded from the oil price collapse five years ago, and they are something we should be modelling ourselves after – not actually modelling ourselves after.

I'm a big believer in doing jurisdictional scans, looking across at other things, picking out what works, but you also have to look at picking out what doesn't work. And what has not worked time and time again, century over century, is

taxation of people to stimulate the economy. That only kills economies.

I guess the most famous one that we can look at is the story of Marie Antoinette. France had just lost a big war and there was a necessity to generate income. So they taxed their people, and because the monarchy was so out of touch with the struggles of the people – Marie Antoinette can be quoted as saying, let them eat cake – when there is no bread available. Why don't they eat cake?

We have not gone that far, thankfully. We have not gone that far that we, as legislators, have distanced ourselves from the struggles of the people of the province, but we need to pull ourselves back from that and encourage economic growth, encourage people amongst our districts. We need to go out and say, listen, come on, we have to jump to the challenge. We have to start spending money in our economy again. We have to support local businesses. We have to support local initiatives. That is where we will rebuild. We will look at our resources, look at the advantages our resources can provide to bringing in new businesses.

We all talk about Muskrat Falls mitigation, and a lot of people focus on this third block of power. Again, I stand to be corrected when I refer to about 33 per cent of the power that we propose to sell across the Gulf. Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? I hope we don't sell one kilowatt of power. I hope there's a demand right here in this province for every kilowatt of power, attracting new businesses, and that's something government and Nalcor and everybody in this Legislature has to look at.

We need to go out to world businesses, go out to local businesses and say, why don't you expand? We can sell you power at half of what it would cost. Why? Because creating business and the opportunity and environment for business to grow creates a strong economy. A strong economy creates jobs, creates tax revenue, and that's where we need to focus on. We need to focus on creating that environment. My colleague for Topsail - Paradise referred to that and I've heard it said throughout this hon. House, government's job is not to create jobs, government's job is to create an environment for those jobs to be created.

I had the recent privilege of attending a grand opening within my district of Genoa industries. The two proponents, the Pecores, they could've set this business up anywhere in the whole entire world, because their business goes everywhere, all over North America, but they chose Newfoundland and Labrador. Why did they choose Newfoundland and Labrador? Because it's home. That will only pay the bills for so long. We have to continue to make our economy and our lifestyle attractive in order to attract more businesses, provide people with more opportunity to set up businesses like that.

Now, in my closing few seconds, I'd like to bring one thing to attention. It takes decades and decades for people to rise up and feel confident about their province and their economy. Unfortunately, it has only taken four to fall to our knees once again. I challenge everybody in this House of Assembly, let's not take four decades to get back where we were. Let's do it in four.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Exploits.

Sorry, Grand Falls-Windsor - Buchans.

MR. TIBBS: Grand Falls-Windsor.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and don't forget the Windsor. I did it once in my life, and by God, they let me know about it still.

I want to reiterate what my colleague said from Mount Pearl North there about Saskatchewan. They had Brad Wall up there as premier and he was a pioneer when it came to eliminating taxes and helping out the small businesses and farmers. He knew what to do with that province. Like my colleague said, he pulled that province right back on track. At one time it was behind Alberta, but very quickly over the past four or five years it jumped ahead of Alberta and it's definitely there now.

I worked throughout Canada for the past 16 years, Western Canada, BC, Saskatchewan, Alberta, Manitoba, drilling for oil and I always

heard the same thing when it came to coming back to Newfoundland. Newfoundland and Labrador is a beautiful place to go, it's a beautiful place to visit but, unfortunately, the taxes may have been too high or the travel, getting there may be too high was well. That was an issue for a lot of people coming here. Once again, whether it be coming here to live or coming here to visit or returning here. Many people want to return here to live.

There are Newfoundlanders and Labradorians all over the world. They all have the same goal one day, for the most part, and that is to get home; to get home to their roots and our culture and our history. Our roots run deep here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The more people we can get home the better, but if we don't make it attractive to get home we're going to get less people home. The flipside of that is the same thing, there are going to be more people leaving of course. So if we have a higher tax rate and there's not an influx into the economy itself, these people are going to stay away. These people are going to move away. I mean, who wants to come to a place where we may have higher taxes or more levies and fees. It just cost too much to get there.

I know it's a little bit different because we are on an island, it's a beautiful island, and it does cost a little more to get here. You can't drive across the strait or whatever, and that's understandable, but people want to come here. So we want to make this place as attractive as we can, and I'm sure that we all want to make this place as attractive as we can.

That has a trickle effect, too, in families and stuff, whether it be daycares – and the amendments we put forth for this budget, a couple of them were daycare taxes and stuff. Just the daycare, for instance, getting more affordable daycare, that's going to create bigger, larger families, and larger families of course creates more people in the province and it's the backend where we need more people.

Our senior citizens, God bless them, they're getting up there. There are more and more seniors it seems to be year after year after year and less people down at the age range where I'm at. So if we can get more people in that end,

that's something we'd be looking at, but the only way to do it is to make this place more attractive. Unfortunately, raising the taxes on certain things, even though they're coming off now – don't get me wrong, I totally agree with this motion today, and it's a good thing that it's coming off now. I think we can do more.

For instance, if we really want to help small businesses we should eliminate the tax on commercial. Commercial premiums should be coming off as well. Eventually, that's something we have to look at. I'm a huge proprietor for small businesses. Small businesses should be given every opportunity they can. We, as government and Opposition, should be helping small businesses as much as we can, giving them every advantage. We all know that small businesses, whether it be in the capital region here or in the smaller places like Grand Falls-Windsor, Deer Lake or anywhere else, these small businesses can be within two weeks of shutting down. They have slow periods during the winter. We all know what Newfoundland and Labrador winters are like.

So giving them a little bit of help along the way here in any way that we can and promoting small businesses and getting them the customers that they need to give them substantial money growth is something that we should be looking at as well. Because if we start losing these small businesses, there goes jobs and, again, there goes people from the province, and that is definitely something that we are looking to get away from here.

The people of the province, from four years ago until now, weren't looking at now I can't take a second vacation or a third vacation this year. They went from one vacation a year to no vacations a year. Don't get me wrong, it's not just the one tax but it's an accumulation of many things. Unfortunately, when you get a family that can't afford the little things that they had for a long time, whether it be a second vehicle – not even a first vehicle for some people, or a family vacation, or a quad to go to the cabin with, it's stuff that you might say bides your time and it gives your family some good family time together to go to the cabin and stuff like that. That can eventually lead into things like mental health issues. The depression and the mental

health that you see across the province when it comes to finances, it's a real thing.

Families, moms, dads, grandparents, when you can't provide for your family, when you have to look at your kids and say you know what kids, I'm sorry, but there's not going to be a family vacation this year, it's very hard on a parent, it's very hard on dad and it's very hard on mom. We got to that point.

Like I say, it's an accumulation of many years of many things. I'm not standing here to point fingers and whatnot, but it's an accumulation that we have to look at because if we can't live – and I don't mean survive, because right now a lot of people are surviving and that's not good enough. But if we can't live, then we've gone wrong somewhere and we need to fix it. Is it an easy fix? Not by a long shot. Of course it's not an easy fix, but it's a fix now that we have opportunity, as a minority government, that we can fix together. And that's something that we should be looking at.

When a parent has to make the choice between groceries and car payment and have to make that choice whether we're going to lose the car or feed the kids, survival – survival in 2019 in Newfoundland and Labrador and Canada, the greatest country on the planet, that's horrible and it breaks my heart to see it. And I have seen it. I've seen it in the capital region. I've seen it in the Grand Falls-Windsor. I've seen it in Buchans. I've seen it in many places and people are on the brink of survival.

When you're only a couple of thousand dollars away from insolvency, and many families are in this province, that's a horrible state to be in. As a parent, I'm sure most of us are parents here, when you have to look at your children and say, you know what, we can't afford this bag of apples, so I'm sorry that's something we can't do right now, you feel horrible about it.

The election that was called before the budget was passed; I don't think that anybody truly wanted it. It's not something that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador wanted. They didn't want to see the tops of the trees and then dive in afterwards. I'm not sure why it was done, but unfortunately the people didn't want this. They wanted to see the budget, how it was

debated and see what the budget had in-depth to offer, and then they could make up their minds. Unfortunately, they didn't get a chance to see that. Of course, they're seeing it now and they can get into it now and not just see the tops of the trees but down amongst the forest and see what we have to offer.

The only good thing that I can see that came from that process was that the 40 Members here – I think somebody said it earlier as well – we did get to go door to door, and we did get to hear some of the things that may not have been in the budget and some of the good things that were in the budget. This is not an all bad budget, of course it's not. It's not easy to come up with a budget. But the budget that was presented, there are some amendments that could've been made. The fact that we went door to door for as long as we did – and all 40 Members did it – gave us an opportunity to see what else could be changed about a budget.

Now, if we had to have the election after the budget was passed, we'd say okay, budget was passed; we'll wait 'til next year and do it again. But this truly gave us an opportunity to dig in and say, well, one good thing that came from this is now we know what people want. Now we truly know what people want – all 40 Members. Just about every house in Newfoundland and Labrador, every door was knocked on, every person was talked to and it was a great opportunity to see what people wanted differently. They got a glimpse of the budget. What did they want differently? So that's why the amendments that we proposed were proposed, to see if any of these could be done. Nobody wants to cut or slash anywhere, nobody wants to raise anything, we just want to see if any money can be allocated somewhere else, if there's something else that we could do and that's all we're asking.

This here today is a fantastic start and we hope to be working from now until next year's budget to do the same thing and maybe get some of these in here. Once again, in a minority government, we have to work together, and that's not necessarily a bad thing right now. But that's one thing that we're trying to do now, when we debate this is let you know exactly what we heard. Because you guys heard the

same thing; I know you have. So that's a couple of things that we are looking at.

Once again, I'd say that we are looking to pass this today. I'm totally supportive of it. I can say all day long it shouldn't have been brought in and no, it shouldn't have. But I wasn't here four years ago. As a constituent back then, it broke my heart and it took a lot of money from myself and my family. I just use an on-the-ground basis as I could've taken that couple of hundred dollars during the month that I could've saved on those taxes and I could've eaten dinner at The Third Place Cafe in Grand Falls-Windsor. The waitress there, what's she going to do? Well, she has a couple of more tips in her pocket. She's going to go to the movie theatre, the Classic Theatre that Shawn Feener owns down the street. And that's a couple of more seats for him. So that's a little bit more profit for him. What does he do? He takes that money, bathroom renovation, and the carpenter next door gets the work for the bathroom renovation and so on and so forth.

I said it yesterday or the day before that money is not meant to be stagnant, to be in our pockets. We have to be moving this. We move it amongst each other and it's just something that makes sense to me and makes sense to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Hopefully, we can work together in a collaboration next time and get some of the amendments that we need done made.

Anyway, I will pass this today and hopefully we recognize this and we make more decisions like this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, if he speaks now, he'll close the debate.

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make a number of remarks based on what I've heard on the other side. And I'll say at the outset, wait until you hear everything I'm about to say, because I commend some of the comments that I've heard.

I'm not trying to be contentious in any way in correcting some of the other comments or in speaking to some of the other comments, but if we're going to work in true collaboration we need to have an understanding of exactly what the facts are move from there.

One of the things, I will say, Mr. Speaker, is that my door is open, I'm open to discussions with any Member of the House on either side of the House on where we can find efficiencies and how we can make things better. Because the 40 of us are truly privileged to be here working for the people of the province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. OSBORNE: I think based on the fact that the 40 of us are here working for the people of the province, there's an expectation that we should work together and try to make things better.

I will correct one comment – and I'm not going to embarrass anybody by pointing out who said what, but there was one comment basically saying government got less than 50 per cent of the votes, so you don't speak for everybody. I'd be cautious in making that comment because somebody could say, well, this side got a higher percentage than that side, so we speak for more people. We all speak for everybody.

If you really wanted to crack it down, there are Members on both sides of the House that got less than 50 per cent in their own district. Is that to suggest that that Member doesn't speak for everybody? I work for everybody in my district. I got almost 70 per cent of the vote in my district but I work for everybody, and that's the attitude we need to take and that's the approach we need to take.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. OSBORNE: My door is open and – you know, it's easy to make buzz statements or use buzz phrases like we need to find efficiencies, so that's what I'm challenging government to do. Well, I'm going to put the challenge back and say help us to do that. Tell us where we find those efficiencies. Don't just tell us where to spend money or where to cut taxes, where to cut revenue, tell us where to find those efficiencies.

My door is open. Call me, make an appointment, I'm happy to hear from you.

One of the things I want to address is the Tax Review Report because – I will say to Members opposite, I'm not trying to be contentious here but if you want to heckle me, speak up, because I'll address each of the comments individually. We're trying to speak here and make things better. That's my intention today.

I want to talk about the Tax Review Committee because it's easy to cut one sentence out of a tax review committee and say it's a terrible reflection of government. Now, in many, many places in this report – I'm not going to read them all because I'll use up my entire speaking time to do it, but in many places there are comments like: "In general, Newfoundland and Labrador's tax system is in line with other Canadian provinces." So, if we're going to cut pieces out of it, let's cut all of it out.

Now, I'll talk a little bit more about what else is in here. Having said that, I realize that the tax measures that were put in place in 2016 – and I'll say, I was sitting in the Speaker's chair at the time, and when the Budget Speech was read out I was getting sick to my stomach at what was unfolding. So I was affected just like every other person living in this province. If you want to look at politics as a popularity contest, you'd have to be absolutely out of your mind to make the decisions that were made in 2016 if they weren't necessary. They were necessary. They were necessary decisions. They were tough decisions but they were necessary.

Even with those decisions, in general this looked at including the temporary gas tax that was still in place when this report was done, including the levy that was still in place – it's going this year – including the automobile insurance tax that was still in place, it's going as a result of this legislation today.

In general, Newfoundland and Labrador's tax system is in line with other Canadian provinces. So it's not the taxes that were in place, it was the fact, Mr. Speaker, that it wasn't a spoonful of Buckley's. It was the bottle of Buckley's and it was all at once.

Anybody who has done biology will remember the lesson we learned in biology. If you put a frog in a cold pot of water and boil it, the frog will stay in it. If you put a frog into a boiling pot of water it will immediately jump out.

So it's not necessarily the level of taxation in the province, it was the fact that in 2006 – and I'll talk a little bit about that as well. The taxes that are in place, or were put in place in 2016, guess what – because many people don't realize this – were almost identical to what was in place in 2006. The problem is in 2006 we took taxes away because the province could afford to do it. In 2016, we put the same taxes back that were in place in 2006 in 2016, to the same level. It may not be penny for penny on each tax identical but it was the same level of taxation, but it was done at once.

I agree with Members opposite when they say it's had a profound effect on families, because it did – it did. Like I said, in the popularity contest known as politics, you'd be out of your mind to do those things if you didn't have to do them. When our bond rating agencies are telling us you're going to get a downgrade if you don't do certain things, and if the lending agencies are telling us you're not going to be able to borrow if you don't do certain things, you do things very quickly. And it was painful. It was painful.

Like I said, I was sat in the Speaker's Chair. I listened to the Budget Speech, and I kept thinking: get to the good news; get to the good news. When the Budget Speech was done, I said: Oh, my God. It was a shock to me.

Now, I didn't have the benefit at the time of sitting around the Cabinet table and hearing exactly the position the province was in. So it came as a bit of a shock to me as well. For anybody who did sit at the Cabinet table and understood what the bond rating agencies were saying and what the lending agencies were saying, they had advance notice. They had a glimpse into what the province was facing.

For the new Members opposite – and this not about laying blame, it's about talking about the position the province found itself in. In December, literally within hours of the Premier becoming Premier, Department of Finance officials made a visit to his office and told him

the province did not have enough cash on hand to make payroll in January. Now think about that for a minute, think about that, because that's the position the province was in.

Also, in the Independent Tax Review: "... effective tax rates vary considerably province to province." Nothing about the bracket rates in this province, credits or personal exemptions stands out – good or bad. So we went back to 2006 levels. Let's not pretend that it's draconian. What was draconian about it was the fact that it was all at once. It had an immediate impact, and I understand that. I understand that.

When a family buys a house and has a mortgage and they got a car with a car payment, and a credit card with a credit card payment, and they've got a set amount of money to pay those bills, and then all of a sudden you go back to 2006 levels all at once, it's a big adjustment. It is a big adjustment.

That's why when I became Minister of Finance, with the direction of the Premier, I made the commitment that we were going to find ways of reducing the tax burden on the people of the province, and as we could afford to do it with a balanced approach we would do it. We would find ways of reducing the tax burden.

I want to eliminate the homeowner's insurance tax as much as you do. I want to eliminate it because I pay it as well. I'm not just a politician, I'm a Newfoundlander and Labradorian. I have children, I have a mortgage and I have a credit card. I understand as well as you do, and I want to eliminate that tax as well, but we can only do it in a balanced approach. Because if we act too quickly the other way, we also risk getting back to a fiscal crisis like we faced in 2015-2016.

If you look at the Independent Tax Review Committee, they say: "Canada's tax system, including Newfoundland and Labrador, is considered" – to be – "progressive and fair."

Mr. Speaker, I can talk in several cases. Like I said, I can read the report out for anybody who hasn't read it. "In general terms, Newfoundland and Labrador's major tax revenue sources are in line with other Canadian jurisdictions."

Now, that might come as shock to anybody who has listened to the mantra of we're taxed to death. It's in the report because they've done an in-depth review of where we are compared to other Canadian jurisdictions.

They say that some of the taxes are higher, but not to the point where we are grossly uncompetitive. When other costs and taxes are considered, our jurisdiction becomes more competitive. I know that's a shock to some people who want to believe otherwise. But if we want to deal in honesty, and I do because I want to work with every Member of this Legislature to make this province better, if we want to deal in honesty we got to start being honest when we stand in debate. If we're going to cherry-pick things that are in this report, I can cherry-pick and say the exact opposite, because that's the reality.

When you look at taxes in this province – and yes, the levy is an ugly thing and I want it gone, and it is gone this year. So if you look at this report and what the report says, the gas tax is now gone. It was there when this report was done. Tax on automobile insurance will be gone when this legislation is passed and it's legal. The levy will be gone in December. That makes us more competitive than some of the other jurisdictions. So let us be honest about that.

This report points out that we're at about the middle of the pack in Canada. With the gas tax, with the levy, with the automobile insurance tax, we were about the middle of the pack. There were some provinces that were more competitive than us, but we were more competitive than some of the other provinces.

Mr. Speaker, if you want to look at that, there was Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia and Manitoba, I think, were more competitive than us, according to this review. Read it for yourself. We were more competitive than the Maritimes and Quebec. So when you look at Ontario, for example, they have a surtax that we don't have in this province. We got the levy, but that's about to go. If you look at Ontario, they have a surtax in Ontario. Anybody who has lived in Ontario or worked in Ontario, they know what I'm talking about. They got a surtax. When you pay a certain amount of tax, you're taxed again over and above the income tax rates. And then

when you pay up to another amount of tax, you're taxed again.

In addition to that, Ontario has a health tax that we don't have in this province. So if you're going to truly compare, you got to look at their surtax and you got to look at the other taxes in the province as well.

Just to put it in true comparison, when you're looking at income tax, not including the surtax, but it says, with the notable exceptions of the Temporary Deficit Reduction Levy – which is gone this year – and the temporary fuel tax – which is already gone – taxes in 2016 were actually comparable to tax levels seen in the province in 2006. There was a great deal of work gone into doing this and comparing and looking at where we are, where we've come from, and where we should be.

They say, as an example, an individual – now this is really important, so I'm asking Members to pay attention to this particular piece. When you look at an individual earning \$66,500 in 2006, they would've had an effective personal income tax rate of about 12 per cent. So keep that in mind: \$66,500 in 2006, they would've had an income tax rate of 12 per cent in this province.

An individual earning \$80,500 in 2016 would also have an effective income tax rate of 12 per cent, including the Temporary Deficit Reduction Levy. So we weren't too far off of 2016. In fact, in some cases we were actually better in 2016 than we were in 2006. Like I said, the problem was we knew there was a problem, there was immediate and drastic measures put in place, and people had to get used to it overnight. That was the problem.

If these things were put in gradually, like boiling the frog, and we went back to 2006 levels – now, don't anybody mistake what I'm saying to think that we are going back to 2006 levels, because we're not. I'm not suggesting that for a minute. But if we had put gradual increases in place to go back to 2006 levels where people could get used to the increases, it wouldn't been such a drastic impact and immediate impact on individuals.

So I understand that immediate impact and how it affected people. I pay taxes as well. As a taxpayer, as a father, and a husband, a homeowner, and somebody who has a balance on a credit card, I'm absolutely anxious to make the tax burden easier for people in this province. So when people on the opposite side are looking at us and thinking that how can you be so unreasonable, if we wanted to continue borrowing money, these measures were put in place to allow the province to do that.

Somebody talked about Saskatchewan and why can't we do what Saskatchewan did. Well, Saskatchewan was facing a downturn in the oil industry. In 2015-2016 we were as well. That's the comparison. Where the comparison starts to fade away is we had far more people in this province working in Fort McMurray, and we relied on their income tax and we relied on their incomes going into the economy than Saskatchewan did. So it was a bit of a perfect storm.

When you look at 2015-16, we were saddled with Muskrat Falls, and I don't want to get into a blame game here because lots of people supported that project based on what they were told, but I was one of them, based on what was promised. But based on what was delivered, I don't support it. I don't support that project because even our bond rating agencies have written in their reports that the total direct and indirect debt to this province as a result of Nalcor and the borrowing for Nalcor and Muskrat Falls is about one-third of our debt.

So in 2015-16, because of that project which was sanctioned only a couple of years earlier, and the borrowing for that project, our debt went up considerably. In fact, the debt servicing, what we pay on debt, went from being the third highest expenditure in the province to the second, in just a matter of two or three years. So some Members on that side of the House can be very thankful that we were the ones putting the Buckley's on the spoon and giving it to people spoonful by spoonful.

I absolutely respect the will of the people and the people who are sitting in this House and the fact that you were chosen and I was chosen and you guys were chosen to represent the people of the province, but the reality is we made tough

decisions. We knew that was going to affect our seat count on this side of the House, but we made them because they had to be made.

So what I'm putting out to all Members opposite now is a very genuine, very real extension offer to say I want to work with you, I want to hear your ideas but I don't just want to hear how we can lower taxes. I want to hear that, absolutely, but not just that. I don't just want to hear how we can spend more money. I also want to hear how we can find efficiencies. And anybody who wants to visit my office or pick up the phone and call me or sit down and have a coffee, let's do it, because we are working together for the people of the province. Forty of us here in this Legislature have a responsibility to work together to make this place a better place to live and to raise a family.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Is the House ready for the question?

The motion is that Bill 1 be now read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: All those against?

The motion is carried.

CLERK (Barnes): A bill, An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act. (Bill 1)

MR. SPEAKER: This bill has now been read a second time.

When shall the bill be referred to a Committee of the Whole?

MS. COADY: Now.

On motion, a bill "An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act," read a second

time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 1)

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 1.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair for the House to resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider the said bill.

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.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Lane): Order please!

We are now considering Bill 1, An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act.

A bill, "An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act." (Bill 1)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against?

CLERK: Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CHAIR: Shall the motion carry?

CLERK: No, no.

CHAIR: No, wait now.

CLERK: Clause 2.

CHAIR: Oh, yes.

Shall clause 2 carry?

Sorry, I'm a little rusty.

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against?

Carried.

On motion, clause 2 carried.

CLERK: Be it enacted by the Lieutenant-Governor and House of Assembly in Legislative Session convened, as follows.

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against?

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act.

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against?

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report Bill 1 without amendment?

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against?

Carried.

Motion, that the Committee report having passed the bill without amendment, carried.

CHAIR: The hon. the Deputy Government House Leader.

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I move, Mr. Chair, the Committee rise and report Bill 1.

CHAIR: It has been moved by the Member that the Committee – wait now. Okay, here we go.

The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 1.

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against?

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 Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands and Chair of the Committee of the Whole.

MR. LANE: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have carried Bill 1 without amendment.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have

directed him to report Bill 1 without amendment.

MR. SPEAKER: When shall the report be received?

Now?

MS. COADY: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: When shall the bill be read a third time?

MS. COADY: Tomorrow.

On motion, report received and adopted. Bill ordered read a third time on tomorrow, by leave.

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 4, that the House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government.

MR. SPEAKER: Do we have speakers to the motion?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LOVELESS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to say, first of all, that the Lieutenant-Governor said here about a week ago that being nervous is a good thing. So I thank the Lieutenant-Governor for saying that.

Mr. Speaker, to say today is a very proud moment for me is without a doubt an understatement, because standing here is something I've wanted to do for a very long time. Of course, in order to accomplish this, I needed the support of the people of the great District of Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune. Well, let me say with much sincerity, thank you to the people of Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune for affording me this opportunity and privilege to be your government representative in this hon. House. I will not let you down.

Mr. Speaker, first of all, to the newly elected MHAs on both sides and the ones that are returning, I'd like to say congratulations. And to you, Mr. Speaker, I say congratulations to returning to the Chair. To the ladies that are at the table in the centre, thank you for your patience for all the questions that we do ask, and for the Pages, for the service they do, thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, I will speak more about the district further into my comments but, before I do, I want to answer the question that many have asked: Why do you choose politics, and how did you know you wanted to be involved or elected? Well, for me it started back in the mid-1990s when I worked in the Government Members Office for about six months and then to the Premier's Office, then Premier Brian Tobin. Shortly after that, constituency assistant to the then MHA Oliver Langdon who was representing, yes, the District of Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

It was a memorable day in that I had a call from a fisherman in Pool's Cove and he needed approval from the Department of Fisheries that also required a payment. So me not knowing who they were – and at the time there were no e-transfers like there are today – and it needed to be done right away so they could their pots into the water and not risk losing a week.

We all know, the most lucrative time in the lobster fishery would be the first several weeks. So I went to the department, got the approval, paid the money, and in the back of my mind: wow, will I ever get paid for paying that money? But, Mr. Speaker, that didn't matter because what I did for them meant that they could put their pots in the water the next day and not be delayed for a week and they continue on with their livelihood.

Mr. Speaker, my point is that it felt so rewarded in helping those people, more than a paycheck could ever offer. I knew at that moment what I wanted to do in life. Making a difference, big or small, in someone's life is where it matters the most. Small things make a big difference. I took great pride in helping others in my time as constituency assistant, and that same pride is still with me today. And I look forward to

helping many others in the district in the days, months and years ahead.

Before elected, I had the privilege of almost 18 years of experience that included being a constituency assistant, executive assistant, researcher, policy advisory and, most recently, 2½ years as executive assistant to Premier Dwight Ball. Let me touch on that time period for a few minutes. I want to thank Premier Ball for his leadership as Premier of this great province.

MR. SPEAKER: I need to remind the Member to please not address other MHAs by their name.

MR. LOVELESS: Sorry.

I want to thank the Premier for being Premier of this great province. But more importantly, to me, as a true friend that helped in many ways. He came into this office during a very difficult time – more difficult than most will admit, especially those across the aisle.

But, Mr. Speaker, strong leaders do make difficult decisions and strong leaders don't lose sight of the end goal, and I believe he showed true leadership in making the tough decisions when knowing that the short-term pain would mean long-term gain. As the saying goes, no pain, no gain; no guts, no glory. And I believe his long-term gain will be appreciated years down the road.

Tough decisions were made along the way and they were necessary, and now we are seeing that we are on the right track. It took determination to keep going on that journey and not to be swayed by the strong opinions and naysayers. The Premier, along with his team, stayed that course, and I'm proud to say today I was a part of it and look forward to continuing to be a part of it as we strive for consistency in this great province we call home. So, Mr. Speaker, I say thank you to the Premier.

I'm also proud to say that I worked in the office of two other premiers: Brian Tobin and Roger Grimes. And the late Beaton Tulk – I didn't work in his office, but I worked alongside of him and had the most admiration for him and thank him for his influence on me and others.

Mr. Speaker, I want to move on to my campaign, as many have talked about here. I enjoyed going door to door immensely and listening to everyone's story because, as all of us can appreciate here, everyone has a story. I heard about the state of the roads; the need for consistency in health care; improving cellphone coverage, very important; home care; further supports for our seniors; improvement in supports for the schools; supports for the traditional fishery; continued support for the aquaculture industry; and other issues as well. I heard it, I listened and I'm going to work hard to deliver on their stories and to improve upon them. That was my utmost promise from the election and one I intend to keep.

Also going door to door – and I'm proud to mention this story – I even had people say to me I remember when as a constituency assistant you helped me with my student loan and you helped me to get into school for a program that I wanted to do. Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to say that those two individuals are now working in the District of Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune in the medical field as paramedic and lab technician.

So I'm extremely proud of those stories because it made a big difference in their lives. I want to continue to do that and I will. There were many highlights of my campaign, but the two examples I'm going to share with you now tops it all off. It goes to my parents. CBC came and interviewed my parents about me and the story of where I was born. When the reporters were in the house and the cameras and lights all around, the reporters asked my mother would she tell the story and her response was: I will do my best for you. That sums up my mother.

Mr. Speaker, I was born on the coastal boat *Nonia* on the bright, blue sea en route from Hermitage to Harbour Breton and my mom captured the attention of the reporters when she said: I delivered the baby with my boots all on. My dad's response about me was: I we were all down in the dumps in the house about something, when Elvis walked in, you lifted us all up. So I'm hoping, Mr. Speaker, in this House that I can lift everybody up here as well.

It was special because they are my parents that raised a wonderful family of nine children. Let me say, they saved the best for last. It was a

proud moment for me and one I will cherish forever. I would also like you to know, plus the nine children, we also had my dad's parents, and we also took in a deaf lady who had no place to go, and she could call our home, her home, and she became an adopted grandmother to us.

We talk about how it was back then and hardships. One thing my mother said to me many times: Elvis, we have to provide for many. There were many times I went to the pot and there was nothing left, so I had to have a slice of bread. Well, I made a promise to my mom that as long as I live, the pot will never be empty again.

Mr. Speaker, the second example is of an individual whom I admire so much. Unfortunately, he's going through a tough battle with cancer. That person is Allan Crewe of Hermitage. Very special person who is a strong individual, and on election day, not feeling very well at all, he made a promise to his wife and to me: If it's the last thing that I do today, I'm going to vote for Elvis. And I'm proud to say that he did vote for me and I will forever remember that. I can't put into words to him what it means, and I will cherish it and carry it with me forever.

It was a great campaign, with a great campaign team, especially my sister Marlene, who I owe a lot to for all the hours she spent with me. From the rough boat rides to the late nights getting home and seeing many rabbits and moose along the way – and no, there weren't any accidents, thank God – we did it.

Also Lauren Carter – and Lauren was on the Premier's Youth Council. She's a young lady from Harbour Breton who has a very bright future, and one I am extremely proud of and spent many hours with me during the campaign. There are many other family members and campaign members. I won't name them as actually I'm scared I would leave someone out, and that's not fair. And a very special thank you to my two kids, Kaitlyn and Ryan.

Another person that wasn't involved in my campaign but she's been involved in my life, and many in this House as well, and that's Vera Barbour. She certainly deserves mentioning. She's been a great friend, and anyone looking

for great political advice, give her a call. She's been a pillar of strength for me over the last numerous years. Hopefully she's watching, so thank you Vera.

Now the district – my district takes in much of Newfoundland's South Coast with a population of just over 7,000 people, according to 2016 Stats Canada. Reaching from Rencontre East, referred to as Round Counter, in the bottom of Fortune Bay all the way east to, as many refer to as, the breathtakingly beautiful community of François, also locally referred to as 'Fransway.'

Before I get into the community of François, I would like to make mention that going door to door in Rencontre East the mayor made mention that they had 12 people that were on Income Support, and over the last several years that number is now zero because of the influence and the growth of aquaculture industry in the area.

Mr. Speaker, the district is also home for me in the Town of Seal Cove - Fortune Bay. I have family in areas in the district in Harbour Breton, English Harbour and Bay d'Espoir and, safe to say, family is your foundation.

Mr. Speaker, the Indigenous people of Conne River, who I'm looking forward to working with and certainly alongside the leadership of Chief Mi'sel Joe, I will be attending this Friday, International Year of the Salmon 2019 Plamu ceremony. Plamu is an important species to the Mi'kmaq, from a food, social and ceremonial perspective. I look forward to that. Plus, I look forward to working with all mayors and town councillors.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about tourism in Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune. I want to reference Cruise Vision Award. The Cruise Vision Award is presented by Cruise Newfoundland and Labrador to an individual, group or business that has demonstrated a commitment to the provincial cruise industry and has contributed significantly to the growth of the cruise industry in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The winner of the Cruise Vision Award is a town that has been involved in cruise for over 10 years. With a population of about 70 people, this town has the ability to come together and

welcome with open arms and homes over 200 cruise passengers in one day.

The cruise industry in Newfoundland and Labrador is built on the backs of many ports of all different sizes. The success of one community is the success the entire province can celebrate. This community works as a whole to showcase all aspects of Newfoundland and Labrador's culture. They throw a big traditional kitchen party, offer local handmade products for sale, and the town's proud and knowledgeable residents act as a local host and provide tours to every cruise passenger.

The town is quickly becoming a frequent stop by many cruise ships. Perhaps the most impressive element of this is the town's success is independently sustainable in all aspects of their infrastructure with generator power, landfill responsibility and water supply. Passengers that arrive quickly realize they have stepped back in time and are in awe of how the town sustains itself while only being accessible by sea or air.

The winner entered the national stage in 2017, when it was one of the only three stops in Newfoundland and Labrador by the C3 exploration cruise that travelled from one side of Canada to the other for Canada's 150th birthday. This award was presented to the Town of François at the Tourism Excellence Awards Gala by Cruise Newfoundland Labrador. So they deserve a round of applause, no doubt.

Mr. Speaker, this is one example of tourism potential in the District of Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune. Our region boasts a tourism industry, offering a variety of adventure and cultural activities, including the infamous Miawpukek First Nation's Powwow, which is held each July at Conne River.

In Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune, there is a traditional festival in every community each weekend throughout the summer, from the first weekend in July to the last weekend in August, and it is worth a visit. It is a fabulous home, a place where one can feel safe and happy and enjoy the best of what nature, family and friends have to offer.

Mr. Speaker, with a name like mine, I love music. From the words of *Music and Friends* to

“The Mummers Song,” to the days of the band, Bonded Stock, to the now-famous (inaudible) from Harbour Breton, we have potential – “All Shook Up.”

Mr. Speaker, we have a lot of tradition to be proud of, and this district has much to offer. I encourage everyone to come and visit. When I worked with the Premier the last 2½ years, he used to say it’s the centre of the universe. Well, to me it is.

Mr. Speaker, I guess touching a little bit on a budget-related item, but also relative to my district’s aquaculture, a common statement from my district is: Where will we be without it? Well, it’s a vital part of the rural economy, and while the industry has had its challenges, they are forging ahead with much promise in store.

Cooke Aquaculture and Mowi have great plans for investment in the district, and I’m looking forward to working with them to bring prosperity to the district and to the province. Because of the aquaculture industry, many other businesses are profiting and growing. In 2015, the aquaculture industry produced 22,815 metric tons, valued at over \$161 million and employed over 400 people.

In 2018-2019, we provided funding for technology, innovation, research and infrastructure to support mussel and salmonid sector growth. We will continue to work with our counterparts to identify many other opportunities.

Furthermore, in 2018-2019, our government’s goal was to shift from an annual to multi-year aquaculture licensing process. This shift offered our aquaculture industry the benefit of longer term focus, greater predictability and more time to devote to business growth, market development, job creation and safe product supply by reducing administrative burden. These actions will advance *The Way Forward – on aquaculture*.

Mr. Speaker, as important as aquaculture is we must continue to support our traditional fishery that has sustained us for so long and still continues to support families in our rural areas. We must not underestimate how much it does contribute to our economy. During the election,

again, Mr. Speaker, I chatted with a fisherman, Roy Cox, in English Harbour West. He continues to fish with his son, and they continue to make a good living; but, he says, we need support. I’m listening to those people to provide support in co-operation with our federal MPs and government.

In keeping with the fishery, I would also like to thank the Premier for appointing me parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources, whom I am looking forward to working alongside of.

Mr. Speaker, our province has much to offer. We are a determined people, determined to be masters of our destiny. We all know we have challenges ahead, but we are ready and poised to move ahead and continue on the path of more jobs, better living conditions for families, good health care services and more.

The task now, though, is to maintain this momentum and keep our fiscal house in order while responsibly addressing the needs of the people of this great province. We can do this, and we will. I am ready to do my part in this new co-operative and collaborative relationship but my question is, are you?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It’s an honour to represent the people of the District of Harbour Main here in this noble House of Assembly. I want to thank the people for electing me. Like each of us, we are privileged, each of the 40 – there are 40 of us who will be privileged to sit here and act and serve on behalf of the people in our districts.

My particular district, as I indicated previously, yesterday or the day before, represents a portion of Conception Bay South, Conception Bay Centre and a portion of Conception Bay North. I can say that it includes wonderful communities and towns. For example, we have the

community of Upper Gullies; Seal Cove; the Town of Holyrood; Harbour Main; Lakeview; Chapel's Cove; Avondale; Conception Harbour; my father's birthplace, Colliers; my hometown, Marysvale; Georgetown; Brigus; Cupids; Cupids Crossing; Roaches Line; Makinsons; South River; Clarke's Beach; Otterbury; North River. All very beautiful, scenic, picturesque and historic and, undeniably, beautiful places to live.

I also must say I'm very proud to be a part of this caucus. We have so many talented, dedicated, committed representatives from all across this great province. A strong Official Opposition, and our caucus, under the distinguished leadership of the Member for Windsor Lake, we are going to work hard, we are going to ensure that each of our districts realizes the full potential that it so deserves and, furthermore, holds this government accountable to the people.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER: Mr. Speaker, one of the interesting things about the District of Harbour Main is its close proximity to St. John's. Many of the residents within the district have to commute on a daily basis for work purposes and post-secondary education back and forth to St. John's. Also, due to the proximity to many of our major industrial sites, for example, Come by Chance, Long Harbour, Bull Arm, Argentia, our residents and hard-working tradespeople have to commute for employment to these areas.

Our tradespeople specifically, we are known in the District of Harbour Main for very skilled, very talented, trained individuals who have a wealth of experience and they are recognized and renowned not only provincially or nationally, but even internationally for their talent and expertise.

We know when we look at our workers and the people that live there, there is such potential in our region. But our potential is clearly vast, it is surely unlimited but, sadly and unfortunately, at the present time it is untapped and it's underutilized. So some of the important issues that we need to recognize, especially in the District of Harbour Main, are the problems that we see. For example, the issue of jobs. Let's talk

about jobs. Not only in my district but we all face this in all of our districts.

We're seeing skilled, qualified Newfoundlanders and Labradorians not getting the jobs they are qualified to hold. They're being overlooked at times. They're being displaced in favour of outside workers. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians – and I've heard this at the door. I've heard this repeatedly when I have gone door to door throughout the campaign and even since post-election campaign, I have heard Newfoundlanders and Labradorian, these hard-working individuals in the District of Harbour Main saying they're not getting the first option for jobs. They're not getting these opportunities.

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians watching as others take these coveted positions that they are skilled and qualified to hold. I've heard these concerns and frustrations repeatedly. I continue to hear them as I meet my constituents, as I go out into the district. Mr. Speaker, we have to recognize these issues with respect to jobs and with respect to our workers. They are concerned and they're very frustrated by what's happening in their province.

Also, I might point out with respect to another big issue, and that is with respect to our seniors. This issue was even probably more pronounced than some of the others. As I knocked on the doors and spoke to many of the seniors, our senior citizens, the sad reality, unfortunately – and I hate to say it, but in our province today, in our beloved Newfoundland and Labrador, we have a changing demographic and more and more our population proportionately has a growing number of seniors and a decreasing number of births. So our health care policy must reflect and must address this change in our society. We need to look at innovative ways. We need to look at a broad and all-encompassing outlook on the health of our citizens, in particular our senior citizens.

Isn't it true, Mr. Speaker, that the quality of life, the quality of each of our lives is very much determined by the quality of our health? So we need to understand that quality health care means reducing wait times, for example, for things like surgery, making emergency rooms more efficient, looking at attracting more doctors to rural areas. In this spirit of working

together, it's incumbent upon us to look for creative ways to change this situation.

Access to quality health care, Mr. Speaker, for seniors that are suffering. I've heard it, like as I'm sure not only our representatives here, but I'm sure that the all of us going out campaigning heard these concerns at the door. That was made loud and clear as I campaigned, at any rate, in the District of Harbour Main. We must always look for ways to support our seniors, and not only support them, but care for them. They must be made a priority. And I have heard this at the door from many senior citizens that, sadly, they feel that this is not the case now and they feel that it has not been under the current administration, that they have not been made a priority. We have to change that.

Not only the issue of seniors, Mr. Speaker. Many of the constituents of Harbour Main tell me that they are struggling to make ends meet. We've heard this before as well. They are overtaxed, excessive taxation. I've had individuals almost in tears speaking to me about what am I going to do. I cannot pay my mortgage. I cannot get groceries. These are real concerns. They are taxed to death; they don't know where the money is coming from. I've heard it at the door as well, as I'm sure everyone here has as well, they want the levy eliminated immediately, not at a legislated date down the road. They cannot live with this levy. It's a regressive tax, and even the government's own Independent Tax Review Committee acknowledged that.

Nor, Mr. Speaker, can the people afford to live with the sales tax on home owner insurance, along with the sales tax on car insurance. We know that the money people save, for example on the levy, will be reinvested in the economy. That's clear. There's no debating that. This generates economic activity. This will generate jobs and this will generate revenue.

Mr. Speaker, I've also heard loudly and clearly from the people that we need to also 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. I've had constituents plead with me to make this point on their behalf. We all recognize that this investment in access to care will, in the long run,

produce benefits for people, and it will produce savings for our province. So we need to look at another way of dealing with this. In that spirit of collaboration, let's work together to try to address these concerns that all of the people of our province are indicating to us.

Another pressing issue in the District of Harbour Main is the 1.6-kilometre school busing policy. We cannot put a price on the safety of our children. Why is this policy still in place, in view of that real and present risk that it presents to our children? We've looked at the factors that are involved. We see that there's increased speeds of vehicles on these roads, the traffic has increased, there's distracted driving and we have no sidewalks in some of these rural areas. Many of our schools, particularly in rural districts like Harbour Main, have schools that require these young children to walk on dangerous highways simply because they live within that regulated 1.6-kilometre zone. Are we to strictly adhere to these regulations when we're putting our young children at risk? Surely, we can find a way to protect our young people like this.

When I review *Budget 2019*, I ask the question: What's behind the numbers? We all heard from our Finance critic, the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port, in his response to the budget. He described the real decline, what's actually happening in our communities, in our cities and towns. He revealed what those numbers really mean. But it's not just numbers and statistics, it's young, talented people leaving our province. In fact, it's our families leaving. We are seeing families leaving, our greatest resource as well, we see our young people leaving. Out-migration should be a very serious concern for all of us. We see the loss of people in our beloved Newfoundland and Labrador. It is a critical problem.

By 2036, Mr. Speaker, that's less than 40 years, if we do nothing, according to the Population Project at Memorial University, our population could fall to under 470,000 people from 525,355. These numbers will not be enough of a workforce to sustain the services that we have at current levels.

Mr. Speaker, we are a province so rich in opportunities, so rich in resources, so rich in our people, but I would say that most of all we are

rich in the most valuable way that we have: our young people. Teaching at the university for the past number of years, I've seen first-hand in the classroom such talented, qualified, exceptional young Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who, unfortunately, have to leave this province to seek job opportunities elsewhere.

Young Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, are very worried. They are concerned about their jobs. They're concerned about our economy, about the high unemployment rate that we have, about the crippling debt that we have encountered. We together, all of us, need to ensure our young people can find opportunities at home. We need to foster an entrepreneurial environment in which our youth can stay here and prosper in their province.

In addition to my duty as Member of the House of Assembly for the people of the Harbour Main District, it is also an honour to have been appointed Justice and Public Safety critic as well as critic for the Status of Women, very important portfolios. I shall carefully execute my duties in those portfolios. I shall carefully examine, I shall carefully question and critique in accordance with the responsibility and the expectation that has been bestowed upon me in these important roles being critic for these portfolios in the Official Opposition.

For example, as critic of Justice and Public Safety, I will seek to ensure that the principles of rehabilitation, restorative justice and reform are front and centre in the delivery of services in our criminal justice system, including Corrections and including in the courts. In my experience for many years as a criminal defence lawyer representing the accused, I have come to the realization that the best possible way to protect our society and its citizens is through rehabilitative programs and initiatives, not strict adherence to punishment models. For is society truly protected when a convicted offender is released back into society without proper rehabilitation and reintegration measures? The research is clear, we will not be protected.

Upon release, as well, there must be rehabilitative measures and programs in order to avoid reoffending and recidivism and further threat to our citizens. But not only upon release, Mr. Speaker, rehabilitative efforts should be the

focus and emphasize throughout the whole criminal justice system, from the very beginning of the process and system, if any meaningful progress is to be made in this area.

With respect to the Status of Women, the department of Status of Women, one of the areas of particular concern for me as critic for the Status of Women is the under-representation of women in the Newfoundland and Labrador Legislature. It is troubling. It is concerning. We must find ways, and working together, we need to find the proper ways to create an environment where more women feel inclined and motivated to run for political office.

The last election, 2019 – just one month ago, approximately – only 25.2 per cent of all candidates were female. We need to have more of our wise and capable women represented at all levels of government. We need to find ways to attract more women to public office.

I feel it necessary, though, to recognize the efforts of the government to create a stand-alone department with its own mandate solely dedicated to the Status of Women, but it's obviously not enough, Mr. Speaker. Much more has to be done to bridge this huge divide, to reach gender parity in leadership and decision-making roles. There is no doubt that advancing women in leadership is critical to advancing women's equality.

According to the United Nations, Mr. Speaker, policy begins to adequately reflect women's concerns when 30 per cent of the government body is female. That is a minimum requirement. Here in Newfoundland and Labrador, we have only 22.5 per cent women in the Legislature. Women hold less than a quarter of seats in elected office in our province.

So, Mr. Speaker, we all have a responsibility to empower women, to recognize and not underestimate the abilities and strengths and experience and skills that women have to offer to this traditionally, male dominated political activity. We need to create new initiatives to encourage more women to enter the political arena.

Mr. Speaker, but there is reason to be hopeful. The people have voted for change, not for the

status quo. That should give all of us hope. The status quo is not okay. The government can no longer govern as it pleases. The people are watching closely. They have put the government on notice that if you fail to provide good and responsible government, you will be held accountable. They have voted for change. We need to be accurate with respect to the facts. The fact is the Liberal government received 43.94 per cent of the support from the people.

The government has to be accountable to the people, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Given the hour of the day – actually, before I say that, I would invite all Members tonight for the Estimates Committee of the Department of TCII, whoever is there for that.

At this time I would move, seconded by the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave, that the House do now adjourn.

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, ‘nay.’

Carried.

In accordance with Standing suborder 9(1)(b), 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.