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Speaker: Honourable Scott Reid, MHA

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The House met at 2 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Reid): Order, please!

Admit Strangers.

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: Today we will hear Members' statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Stephenville - Port au Port, Lewisporte - Twillingate, Mount Pearl North, Labrador West and St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

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

MR. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Province of Newfoundland and Labrador has a rich culture and heritage that makes us all proud.

In 1995, three local francophone groups on the beautiful Port au Port Peninsula joined forces in creating a regional francophone organization to promote, preserve and celebrate the wonderful francophone culture and language of the West Coast.

Twenty-five years later, L'Association Régionale de la Côte Ouest (ARCO) has a lot to celebrate. Fitness gyms in our rural communities, children's books that share our culture, French bread ovens for our families and visitors, regional bilingual festivals, promotional music videos, bilingual CDs and French flag licence plates, of which I am proud to say I have one.

Congratulations to the volunteers and employees of ARCO. Here's to another 25 years of success.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lewisporte - Twillingate.

MR. BENNETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It gives me great privilege to recognize an exceptional role model from my district. Ms.

Jade Roberts of Twillingate was a very accomplished athlete in her youth, excelling in a variety of sports, including a silver medal at the national Figure Skating Championships.

Jade is now a competitive cross-country runner and in 2019 she represented Memorial University Sea-Hawks at the Atlantic University Sports Championships, where she not only ran away to win the gold medal, she also was named the female cross-country Athlete of the Year.

Another highlight in her running career happened in April, when Jade was honoured with both the Butler Trophy for the overall female athlete of the year at Memorial University and the Jubilee Cup for the female MVP of the Sea-Hawks Cross Country team.

Jade's athletic career can only be surpassed by her professional career. She followed in her mother's footsteps in becoming a nurse and currently works at the Janeway pediatric intensive care unit. On March 11 her lifelong dream came true, when she was accepted into Memorial University faculty of medicine.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members to join me in congratulating Jade Roberts for all of her accomplishments and wish her continued success in her athletics and her studies at medical school.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LESTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today I would like to acknowledge the many blood donors from Mount Pearl North and across our province and country who voluntarily donate their blood and blood products to save lives. It isn't every day you can do something to save someone's life, but that's exactly what you do every time you donate blood.

Even the best trained medical personnel using the most advanced equipment can become helpless in the event of a patient needing blood. Blood is special. It can't be manufactured and it

can't be replaced by animal blood. The gift of blood is essential to saving lives and can only come from another human being. There are no substitutes.

There is a constant need for regular blood supply because blood can only be stored for a limited time. We can all save precious lives and bring smiles just by donating blood.

A few moments of your time will be greatly rewarded by the thought of saving a loved one, a cancer patient, a bleeding child or an injured motorist. Donating blood takes minutes and the benefits can preserve a lifetime.

I ask all those present to join me to celebrate and thank individuals who donate blood, and encourage those who have not yet donated blood to consider donating, as the need for blood and blood products is greater now than ever.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BROWN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to pay tribute to a dear friend, Art Huxter, who passed away on January 20, 2020.

Many locals will say it was an honour to have met and worked with Arthur. He had many stories to tell and a contagious laugh. Art was a union activist for over 40 years in Labrador West, starting out as a shop steward before joining the union executive.

Arthur worked at the Iron Ore Company of Canada and was a dedicated member and rep for all members of 5795. He served for 40 years on the executive, with 37 of them as their financial secretary.

Arthur could be found at the union centre volunteering hundreds of hours to fellow members, fighting for each member to be treated with fairness. Art provided solid leadership and guidance. His contributions to improving the financial viability of all USW locals during

labour negotiations was something that the local union took pride in.

Arthur's passion for helping others did not stop with his local. He was also a long-time advocate and volunteer for local food banks. Arthur was a friend to all. He was loved by his family and many in his community.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in remembering Arthur and his dedication to his family, his local and our community.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. COFFIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Black Lives Matter NL is a local chapter of a global movement founded in 2013 in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murderer. Black Lives Matter Foundation Incorporated is a global organization whose mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on black communities.

In the wake of the murder of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis, Black Lives Matter NL held a historic rally against systemic, anti-black racism and police violence. Thousands kneeled in solidarity as organizers and speakers brought to light the need for action on anti-black racism in our province.

The solidarity and compassion I witnessed at this rally moved me, and I would like to thank its organizers: Khadeja-Raven Anderson, Precious Familusi, Nuna Toweh, Brian Amadi, Rioko Milani, Dr. Delores V. Mullings, Dr. Sulaimon Giwa, Dr. Zainab Jerrett, and community advocacy groups including the Anti-Racism Coalition NL, MUNSU, Planned Parenthood of Newfoundland and Labrador and STARFest.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in thanking Black Lives Matter and recognizing their work to end anti-black racism in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Black Lives Matter, Mr. Speaker.

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: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm pleased today to recognize June as Recreation Month. This year, more than ever, being involved in recreational activities is important for our physical and mental health.

While we may be limited in the ways we can interact with others as we learn to live with COVID-19, now is an excellent time to discover new ways to be active in our own homes, backyards and communities.

As a government, we recognize the vital role recreation plays in helping us lead healthy, active and balanced lives, and we remain committed to supporting initiatives that promote healthy active living.

Our Community Healthy Living Fund is an important part of this commitment, as it provides funding for initiatives such as exercise and activity programs for people of all ages, community infrastructure like playgrounds, trails and community gardens, and healthy eating programs in communities throughout our province.

Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the many recreation partners who have developed innovative approaches during this public health emergency and have maintained connections in communities with people who may be experiencing social isolation.

This includes everyone at Recreation Newfoundland and Labrador, an organization that provides many benefits to our communities, including leadership and training for recreation professionals and volunteers.

I invite all hon. Members and all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to celebrate

Recreation Month by staying active and involved as we adjust to a new normal.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. DWYER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement.

Today, I join with the minister in recognizing June as Recreation Month. This pandemic has been tough on the people of our province, which is why it is so important for individuals to practise self-care and attend to both their physical and mental health.

It has been particularly challenging to provide safe outlets for people in Newfoundland and Labrador to be physically active at this time; however, our partners in our recreation community have answered the call. This is a testament to their innovation and commitment to our province.

I wish to thank everyone in our recreation community and wish everyone a safe and active Recreation Month, June 2020.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I, too, thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement.

I commend the volunteers and staff working with hundreds of community organizations around the province to provide recreational programs every year in their communities. These programs provide not only physical recreation but also opportunities for people to socialize and develop leadership skills.

These groups are facing many challenges this summer because of the need for physical distancing, and I encourage government to do what it can to support them in overcoming these challenges and in adjusting to a new normal.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources.

MR. BYRNE: Mr. Speaker, every year more farmers are accessing high-quality vegetable transplants and getting a head start on the growing season by availing of the Provincial Vegetable Transplant Program.

This initiative aims to increase the variety and the amount of produce we grow in Newfoundland and Labrador by planting crops and using agricultural techniques that are best suited to Newfoundlander and Labrador's specific growing conditions.

Mr. Speaker, to address Newfoundland and Labrador's increased food security needs during the COVID-19 pandemic – and thanks specifically to the efforts of dedicated staff at the Wooddale Centre for Agricultural and Forestry Development – we have prepared and delivered three million vegetable transplants in 2020 to 65 eligible commercial farmers across the province. That's nearly double the 1.7 million transplants delivered to 54 farmers last year. That's nearly 15 times more than the 225,000 transplants when the program first started in 2018.

With proper planting and care, three million transplants have the potential to produce approximately 3.8 million pounds of vegetables – the equivalent of 63 tractor-trailer loads of fresh, home-grown broccoli, cabbage, onion, kale, cauliflower, rutabaga and lettuce to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians so that they can buy from local markets come harvest time.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the agricultural sector is growing in Newfoundland and Labrador thanks to farmers who are dedicating their lives to

producing fresh, nutritious foods. I wish them a fantastic season and look forward to a bountiful harvest ahead.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LESTER: I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

There has been a growing awareness of the importance of local food production, food supply and food security in our province this year. I am sure that most people were alarmed in April when the Premier stated the province only had a five-day food supply. Simply put, we need to do better; we must do better.

Mr. Speaker, providing transplants is only one small step of a tall staircase to increasing our food security. The minister may or may not realize that the agriculture industry in our province will not be able to expand if the government continues to erode the funds and programs for farmers.

In addition to transplants, farm operations must acquire innovative equipment, expand storage capacity, and most importantly, develop and improve agricultural land. Farmers are reporting to me continued frustration with Crown Lands, a lack of long-term storage, a seasonal market oversupply, non-existence of an active moose predation policy and slow rollout of provincial programs.

Mr. Speaker, the Vegetable Transplant Program can help farmers increase crop variety and get a jump on the growing season. We are glad to see the number of plants and numbers of farmers availing of this program is increasing.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I would like to wish all farmers, both commercial and hobbyists, a successful growing season.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I, too, thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. I'm delighted to hear of the continued success of this excellent initiative.

Anyone familiar with growing vegetables in our unpredictable spring weather knows the advantages of these transplants, or starts as they are known. I hope the minister is working just as hard on initiatives at the other end of the vegetable farming, developing marketing plans, cold storage options and other ways of ensuring fresh local vegetables get to the market.

Farmers have vegetables in the field; let's make sure they also get to the tables of this province.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to highlight enhancements to the Provincial Student Loans Program for the 2020-21 academic year.

These improvements align with changes to the federal Canada Student Loans Program and will help mitigate the impacts that the COVID-19 public health emergency will have on students for the coming academic year.

Enhancements to the provincial program include increasing the weekly loan limit to \$100 per week of study from \$40; bringing the combined provincial loan and grant weekly limit to \$200; and exempting student and spousal contributions when assessing applications for provincial student aid.

This is in addition to the temporary suspension of both federal and provincial student loan repayments until September 30, 2020.

I am also pleased to announce that the student aid application for 2020-21 launched this week, thanks to staff from the Student Aid Division and the Office of the Chief Information Officer. This is another example of the great work public

service employees are doing during these unprecedented times.

Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes the impacts that COVID-19 has had on students. The combined effects of these enhancements to the Provincial Student Loans Program and the Canada Student Loans Program will ensure post-secondary students have access to much-needed financial assistance.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement.

Mr. Speaker, my colleagues and I join with the minister in welcoming enhancements to the Provincial Student Loans Program. Anything we can do to enhance the accessibility for students is welcome news. Having worked with many people in the department over the years, I can personally attest to the dedication and work ethic of the Student Aid Division staff and their drive to help and assist students.

Mr. Speaker, I do have some reservation. I note the minister referenced increasing loan limits. I would assume that student groups have been consulted and are in favour of this over the possibly of increasing student debt burdens.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, I do urge the minister to take some leadership in ensuring specific information is provided to post-secondary students on program details and how instruction will be provided in the fall. Uncertainty and a lack of information continues to be a major issue with post-secondary students.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. COFFIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. This slight increase helps students now, but I remind the minister that increases in loans now create a larger debt burden in the future. Instead, we need increases in the provincial student grants, especially in these dire times.

I also remind the minister that our international students receive far fewer benefits from the federal government and pay higher tuition fees. Many are struggling during the pandemic and need more supports too.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

MR. CROSBIE: Mr. Speaker, did the Minister of Justice consult the wisdom of his caucus colleagues before attempting to ram through the judges' pay raise?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

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

The Member knows quite well how this process goes. The reality is that every Attorney General since 1991 has received one of these tribunal reports and that they are obligated by law to bring them to the House of Assembly, no matter what they may think of them.

The Member knows that. His wife ran a tribunal in 2001, so he should be quite aware.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: I thank the minister for his reminder of my wife's professional activities.

In legal circles, missing a critical deadline to do something is called negligence. Was the minister negligent in missing the deadline for wetland capping?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

MR. A. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'm quite happy to answer questions on this.

As I reminded the Member, I think it was back in December, I believe the Auditor General is doing a report on this. I absolutely cannot wait to talk to the Auditor General when requested. In fact, I have written to the Auditor General asking when I may have an opportunity under oath to answer any questions. I will speak to the Auditor General when I get that request.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Well, Mr. Speaker, the problem with that is we don't have an Auditor General and there can't be a report until one is appointed. The minister may want to speak to the Premier about that.

Mr. Speaker, the minister is not speaking to negligence but we know he missed the deadline. If this was not negligent, was it deliberate?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

MR. A. PARSONS: I'll repeat the answer that I just gave in case the Member wasn't listening. When it comes to the Auditor General, if the position is open he's more than welcome to apply for it and go through the Independent Appointments Commission.

I have gone directly to the Auditor General and said I would be more than willing under oath to answer any questions that they may have, and I look forward to that. I can't wait for the opportunity.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Mr. Speaker, there's mounting frustration which has boiled over in an email sent to members by the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary Association asking members if they still had confidence in leadership. This extraordinary move has shaken confidence in the Constabulary.

As the Attorney General, does the minister feel the RNC still has confidence in him?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

MR. A. PARSONS: I guess the Member is trying to take a different attack or direction here. What I will say to the Member is I just had a meeting with the RNCA two days ago, and I can tell you there was no lack of confidence expressed there.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: That's very inspiring, Mr. Speaker. It's difficult to fully credit it in the face of the fact that a survey was conducted of members of the Constabulary Association, which found that 48 per cent feel they cannot bring forward a grievance complaint or appeal without fear of reprisal.

I ask the minister again: As top law enforcement official, how does he defend this indictment of his leadership?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

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

I think the Member is trying to make a connection that doesn't actually exist. As it

stands right now, the RNCA is going through a survey process with their members, which I understand is still ongoing, so we can speak to it then.

What I will say is if we want to talk about confidence, I understand the Member is going through his own leadership review. So the question I would put back is, do you have the confidence of everybody around you, Sir?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. K. PARSONS: It's obvious the minister don't like to be asked questions.

I have a question that's pretty appropriate. The Auditor General's position has become vacant since March 11. The Public Accounts Committee met this morning and we're wondering: When will we see a new Auditor General in place?

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There is an Acting Auditor General in place at the moment, I will remind the Member opposite. The process is underway to have the IAC appoint an Auditor General on a full-time basis.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. K. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I don't mean to correct the Minister of Finance, but there is no Acting Auditor General in place. The Deputy Auditor General is in place but there is no Acting Auditor General in place right now; plus, there is no position that's being advertised for the Auditor General yet.

It's been three months since the Auditor General's position has been vacated and there are some important investigations underway like the wetland capping scandal, cannabis growth industry investigation.

I ask the minister: Isn't it time to put an Auditor General in place so we, as a Public Accounts Committee, can continue with our work?

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I believe the Deputy Auditor General is running the office there at the moment, Mr. Speaker. I don't think there's anybody on this side of the Legislature that would say that we don't have confidence that that individual is able to carry out the duties in the process.

The process internally has started to ensure that the IAC are given instructions to carry forward with the search for a new Auditor General.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PARROTT: Mr. Speaker, in 2018, the former minister launched an RFP to ensure the economic viability of Marble Mountain. In Estimates 2019, the minister said the department was still reviewing proposals. It is now 2020.

I ask the minister: Why have you failed to take action on this file?

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

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for the question.

As I said back then, and I will say at this point, we did enter into an RFP for the sale of Marble Mountain in 2018. We're still working through that process. As soon as we're finished that process, I will be more than happy to present it here to the House or to the general public. I look forward to that day as well, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PARROTT: I assume by the minister's response that it's safe to say that this RFP is similar to the one in Bull Arm: You're waiting for the right friends to apply.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister table all the responses to the June 2018 RFP, along with the decision and evaluation matrix which was used to make the decision and evaluate the proposals?

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

MR. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for the question, although I am disappointed by the tone. That's not what we're into in this House of Assembly, I don't think.

From my standpoint, we entered into the RFP process, as I said, in 2018. We're moving through that process; we're in the final stages now. As soon as we reach that culmination of that report, I'm more than happy to meet with the hon. Member, as he knows. I'm more than happy to bring it to the House of Assembly and we will go out in public with that answer as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PARROTT: Mr. Speaker, Marble Mountain is subsidized by taxpayer money to function. A recent news article quotes the Finance Minister as saying he may be interested in offloading money-losing assets like Marble.

I ask the minister: Do you agree with the Minister of Finance that Marble Mountain should be sold?

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

MR. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, I'll refer to my last answer to say that I unequivocally support the idea that Marble Mountain should be sold. That's why we entered into an RFP process. We're working through that process. Obviously, we would like to see that process finished in a

positive way. I look forward to that day coming forward in this House of Assembly or into the public domain and I look forward to meeting with the Member to discuss that very topic.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. TIBBS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Lionel Kelland hospice was promised to Grand Falls-Windsor during the election last year as an election promise.

I ask the minister: When will construction begin on the much-needed Lionel Kelland hospice, or is he continuing the trend of playing politics with our health care system and avoiding the people in Grand Falls-Windsor and the commitment he's made?

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

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

I welcome the question. I'm pleased to inform the House that the design project work is under way and, as far as I'm informed, is on schedule, and that there are no obstacles from our point of view to this proceeding on the schedule that was outlined when Mr. Bradley and I made that announcement in Grand Falls a little while ago.

I would also like to take the opportunity now that the subject has been raised to thank Mr. Bradley for his service as chair of the Lionel Kelland Hospice foundation. He has retired recently from that role and he will leave a great legacy behind him, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. FORSEY: Mr. Speaker, also in the 2019 election the Premier promised to reinstate the 24-hour emergency service at the Dr. Hugh Twomey Health Care Centre in Botwood.

Minister: Instead of taking services from my district, will the minister promise to reinstate the 24-hour emergency service?

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

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

My colleague from Transportation and Works informs me that the \$20 million investment in a new facility add-on at the Hugh Twomey centre is well under way and well on schedule. That will then be fully staffed with new employees, new employment for the area. And at that time the demand and the staffing will be examined to see whether or not there is a need to change the way emergency services are provided to the people in Botwood – bearing in mind it's 20 minutes from Central Newfoundland Regional Health Centre.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A recent RBC report indicates that retail sales for this province are forecasted to drop by 10 per cent. Small and medium businesses are facing cost increases and reduction in revenue. These businesses are the job creators. Without them we will not recover.

I ask the minister: How many small and medium businesses have closed in this province since January 1?

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is a concerning and uncertain time, not only for Newfoundland and Labrador, not only for every province in Canada, but globally, Mr. Speaker. We have come up with a number of programs and incentives to try and help boost the economy to ensure that we try and save as many businesses as possible. There is no doubt that the pandemic has been difficult on businesses, and there's no doubt that some businesses will see that the pandemic has taken a toll on them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. WAKEHAM: I realize the minister can't provide an exact number, but I do want to point out that in my district – and I'm sure in the districts of all of the Members here – there are a number of businesses who have been told by their landlords that they will not be applying for the rent program that was offered up by the federal and provincial government. These businesses have no way of accessing those funds without supports.

So I ask the minister: Will you look at making changes to the rent program so that the monies that you have committed to can be delivered right to the tenants?

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's an important point that the Member raises. I will say that it is a federal program. The parameters of the program are federal. I've raised the same concerns he's just raised with the federal minister. We've had regular calls with the federal minister. I know other provinces have similar concerns.

So far, we've got close to 200 tenants in this province who will benefit as a result of that program. Unfortunately, not every landlord is applying so there is a gap there; there is absolutely no doubt about that. We certainly urge every landlord to give the benefit to the tenants. It would be better for the landlord,

better for the tenant, better for the economy in that long run.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd ask the minister then: Would he commit to providing some of the funds that you've allocated, if it's not going to be used as part of the federal program, will you make them available for those businesses whose landlords refuse to take part in the program?

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not sure what funds the Member is talking about. The program is cost-shared. It is a federal program, but we're putting in a very small amount of the overall funding that goes into this program because it was a federally announced program; the parameters are set by the federal government. Those parameters are consistent across the country. We may not see that every landlord is taking advantage of this, Mr. Speaker, which is a gap. We've raised that. Several provinces have raised that with the federal government seeking change, but we are required under the federal program to put our share in.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

During this pandemic, many workers now will not get financial support. They work many hours, many overtime hours.

I ask the minister responsible: How can you penalize people for putting themselves at greater risk?

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, the lower income essential work program is a federal program. The parameters of that program were set by the federal government. The Member may recall when the program was initially announced the federal government said that it capped out at a maximum of \$2,500 a month income as the threshold before people could qualify. It took an exceptionally long time in this province to get approval from the federal government because we had pushed to stretch the parameters, including a \$3,000 threshold in order for people to qualify.

Again, we recognize the valuable work of every essential worker, but those are the parameters set by the federal government.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Not only did employees step up, employers also stepped up and increased the wages for those who had to go to work and put themselves at greater risk.

I ask the minister responsible: What are you doing for these employers?

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a very important point that the Member raises. There were some employers, in order to ensure that their employees continued to show up for work and provide services to the public – and I do want to say again, because I think it's important, that while the parameters of this federal program don't recognize everybody, as a province we do recognize everybody, those who went to work in essential jobs providing essential services. But it is an important point that the hon. Member raises, that some of the employers did put additional money to their employees to get them to show up for work.

I think the federal program was meant to level the playing field. Some employers were not able to afford that and this ensures that lower income employees get some of that benefit.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

At a press conference on Monday morning past, the Premier said that the program was to thank people who continued to work even though the fear of the Coronavirus was at its peak.

How come front-line health care workers were not included?

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

MR. OSBORNE: One of the things that we did in stretching the parameters put forward by the federal government was ensuring that the federal guideline of \$2,500 was increased to \$3,000. One of the other things we did was broaden the list of people who would qualify.

So we've gone with the federal government's public safety list of essential workers which is very, very broad. There are health care workers on that list. Unfortunately, the federal government's cap of \$2,500 would have been even less people than what we pushed for when we had it increased to \$3,000. But again, we have to live within federal parameters. They had to sign off on and agree to that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

It's encouraging to hear that we stretched the parameters, we're recognizing people, yet they are falling through the cracks and not being recognized or paid for the work they did during this pandemic.

Substitute teachers play a critical role in our education system, and we've received emails from them. I want to ask the minister responsible: What has he done to ensure there are supports provided to ensure the financial security of our substitute teachers?

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

MR. WARR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for the question.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize the important role substitute teachers play in the education system. The pandemic and subsequent closure of schools and many services and businesses was sudden and unprecedented.

There have been some opportunities for substitutes, as I said previously in this House of Assembly. When we put in the child care program for essential workers, we used substitute teachers, where students were going to school – having child care in schools.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to point out to the hon. Member that the CERB program was in place and good news that the CERB program is going to be extended.

Again, we recognize the important role of substitute teachers. I'm hoping to have – thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LESTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, when the House was asked concerning our concern of food security, how we only have a five-day supply, the Premier replied there was *The Way Forward* and it was not a concern. I can guarantee you paper and promises will not put food on the table of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I once again ask: Has there been anything done to extend our food supply in this province beyond five days?

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

MR. BYRNE: Thank you so much for the question, Mr. Speaker. It's an important question.

The answer is yes. Not only has this government seized on the opportunity for farmers to expand our own domestic production, but we've also realized that by producing just 10 per cent of what we eat, by doing that for generations we have failed our citizens.

That is why we have deliberately – we're the first government to take food security seriously and build upon it. That's why we instituted a three-million strong transplant program and we do not want one of those transplants ever to go to waste.

We want to make sure that we grow our cattle industry; we want to make sure that we grow our apiaries. We want to make sure that we grow all food supplies in Newfoundland and Labrador and, Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to it.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LESTER: Once again, words and promises. I don't think that's going to fill my belly, that's for sure.

I ask the Finance Minister: Has government provided funds to secure a supply of corn, barley and wheat to ensure producers of eggs, chicken, milk, beef, lamb and pork have production ability for the coming year?

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

MR. BYRNE: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, for that question.

It is a very important question because what the hon. Member is asking is, is this government

committed to spending the necessary resources. The hon. Member is encouraging the government to spend the necessary resources to get the job done, to fulfill all of its commitments on food security. Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to hear that commitment, that they will be supporting the government as we bring forward initiatives to spend resources, valuable money, to expand our food security.

This is a welcome message for this government from the Opposition; however, I can say to you, Mr. Speaker, those initiatives are well under way. I tell you what will be feeding the bellies of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians: those three million transplants that are coming from Wooddale, being planted in farmers' fields throughout the entire province. It's making a huge difference.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North, time for a quick question and a quick answer.

MR. LESTER: Well, this just goes to show that the minister doesn't fully comprehend his department. The provincial government actually extends a loan guarantee each year to the livestock producers of Newfoundland and Labrador to secure a supply of grain for this coming fall.

I ask again: Has the government extended that guarantee?

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

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

Teach a fisher to fish and they will be able to feed themselves for a very long time, and what we have done is we have expanded the capacity to be able to produce forage for our cattle producers. Because you know what, Mr. Speaker? Instead of being a solution in search of a problem, which is what the hon. Member is often engaged in – he's often engaged in the

process of becoming a solution in search of a problem – what we have done is we have expanded forage production so that our cattle producers and our dairy farmers can be self-sufficient. That's the real answer here.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. COFFIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today we will talk about systemic racism. One hundred and forty-four Indigenous and non-Indigenous women have been murdered or are still missing in Newfoundland and Labrador; Indigenous women are 12 times more likely to go missing or be murdered than non-Indigenous women; Indigenous women in Canada are 3½ times more likely than non-Indigenous women to be the victims of violence and intimate-partner violence and they are more often subject to severe intimate-partner violence resulting in death.

I ask the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women: After four years in government, why have these statistics gotten worse and what is she going to do about it?

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

MS. HALEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. Member for her question.

First of all, allow me to say thank you to the families and survivors who relived the tragic losses while testifying before the inquiry, Mr. Speaker, as well as the elders and knowledge-keepers for all their inputs.

COVID-19, as you know, has presented its challenges, Mr. Speaker, but the provincial government, I can assure you, has remained committed to the national action plan to prevent violence against Indigenous women and girls.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BROWN: Mr. Speaker, systemic racism and ignorance towards our Indigenous peoples is very much apparent in our province and has become more prevalent in recent years.

I ask the minister responsible: What concrete actions is government planning in order to fight racism in this province?

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

MS. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank my hon. colleague for raising this very important topic.

Mr. Speaker, not just as an MHA in this government, but as a member of an Indigenous group in Labrador, I'm really proud of the progress that this government has made in building relations with Indigenous governments. The Premier's round table sitting with Indigenous governments, to my knowledge, it's never happened before in our history – and I've been at that table.

I had opportunity, right before COVID hit the province, to sit down with the federal minister, Carolyn Bennett, to discuss the calls to action on the missing and murdered. And I can tell this hon. House that it is an active file, it's a priority for me, it's a priority for this government and we'll continue to work with the federal counterparts to make sure that there is progress and that less lives are lost.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Labrador West, time for a quick question.

MR. BROWN: Mr. Speaker, we continue to hear nice things in this House about fighting racism.

I ask this government: Will they create a task force to end systemic racism within government and this province?

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

MS. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, my hon. colleague raises a very important topic.

Mr. Speaker, work has been ongoing since we have formed government, sitting at the table with Indigenous groups, sitting at our federal tables and we'll continue to do that.

I recently, Mr. Speaker, heard an Indigenous leader in Labrador say never before in their experience have they had an open door policy with any government to bring forth the issues of concerns to Indigenous groups like they have had with this administration.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. JOYCE: I ask the Minister of Health – people have a lot of anxiety concerning cancelled medical procedures. I've been contacted about cancelled heart surgeries, people needing pacemakers, 100 per cent blockages, eye treatment and hip replacements. This is very serious.

What can the minister tell these people who desperately need these health procedures and relieve the high level of anxiety which they are experiencing?

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

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

It's a very timely question, given the fact we're now emerging from Level 3 with the prospect of going to Level 2 next week having been announced literally as the House sits.

The RHAs have a plan. Individual patients who were scheduled for surgery will be contacted by their clinicians. If their condition has changed, that fact needs to be passed on through their primary care provider to the specialist.

In the case of cardiac care, that is a seamless integration at the moment because we now have MyCCath, which is a made-in-Newfoundland-and-Labrador solution which allows patient, primary care provider and cardiologist to be all on the same page.

With other disciplines, I'm meeting with the NLMA next week to discuss how best to deal with the backlog.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. JOYCE: I thank the minister for that.

The Minister of Transportation and Works, Route 450 had a major flood in January 2018, almost three years ago. There were some improvements. The Rattling Brook Bridge and Cammies Brook Bridge will be replaced. The condition has deteriorated to the point where there are serious safety concerns.

There is a tender, but it hasn't been awarded and is waiting to be awarded. We're waiting for the funding from the rural and northern fund.

I ask the minister: When will your department be issuing this tender?

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

MR. CROCKER: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Member for the question.

Mr. Speaker, there is a tender in place that has closed on Route 450. It's quite an extensive tender, getting a lot of work done on that section of road this year. I can assure the Member that at the moment we get the final written approvals from Ottawa through the northern and rural funding, the award letter will be out.

I can assure the Member, from conversations I had earlier today, we're expecting that funding approval from Ottawa any time at all now, Mr. Speaker. I can assure the hon. Member that the

moment we get that approval from Ottawa the award letter will be issued.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Mount Scio.

MS. STOODLEY: Mr. Speaker, I'm tabling a letter to the Privacy Commission of Canada for my PMR in March.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Further tabling of documents?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: I think the Standing Orders allow ministers to table documents. A Member would have to have consent to table a document.

Does the Member have leave of the House to table the document?

I'm seeing no objections, so we will accept the document.

Further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notices has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There are many people in Newfoundland and Labrador who are very concerned about how our K-to-12 education has been impacted by the public health measures implemented due to COVID-19, and are further concerned about what the plan will be to deliver education in this province in September. This is particularly concerning for parents of children with special needs.

Therefore we the petition the House of Assembly as follows: to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to direct the province's school boards to develop and make public a plan to address the upcoming school year.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say, as I have said previously, when it comes to these issues with the schools and so on around education, I have to give credit once again to the Minister of Education and his executive assistant. They have been very co-operative. I really do appreciate that.

The purpose of this petition is certainly not to be critical, to beat up on the minister or anybody at the English School District, but the minister I'm sure would know and admit himself, that nobody expected COVID-19 really to happen and to impact us the way it did, but it did have an impact, a sudden impact on our school system. I know the school boards did, perhaps, the best they could. I know teachers did the best they could, but nobody can deny the fact that there were a number of challenges this year in trying to deliver curriculum, whether it be just the logistics of it or issues around having people able to avail of technology and so on. There were challenges.

These challenges are exacerbated even further when you have children, for example, that have exceptionalities and special needs who, at the best of times, are challenged when it comes to our education system. This year is what it is. Everyone did the best they can, but we need to ensure – and what I'm hearing from parents is that they want some assurances that there will indeed be a plan in place for September. Whatever that plan might look like, if it's going to be virtual, if it's going to be in-classroom, if it's a going to be a combination of both. Obviously there's going to be a lot of

considerations in delivering these programs, but I just want to say that parents are concerned.

I know the minister knows this. I'm sure every Member in this House of Assembly has gotten emails or phone calls or whatever from parents, families in their districts who are concerned about their children's education, what it's going to look like in September. Obviously, like the health care system, we need to make sure we have a plan as we move forward, and this is just encouraging the minister to make sure that that happens for September.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. WARR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I certainly appreciate the petition that the hon. Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands has brought forward.

Mr. Speaker, as he spoke so candidly, there are many, many concerns from parents, from teachers. I've heard from students. I've heard from just about every Member in this House of Assembly with regard to constituents within their own districts on the education system.

Mr. Speaker, discussions and planning with the school districts, the NLTA, Public Health officials and as well as the Federation of School Councils, these consultations are happening. Even this past week, consultations with school council chairs and parent representatives were happening

The plan will provide an approach, Mr. Speaker, and guidance for school districts to put in operation, given the particular status of the pandemic at that time and the advice of Public Health. Mr. Speaker, we are planning on having full in-class instruction come September; however, depending on the chief medical officer of health, we will make plans as we go forward.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. DWYER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I present a petition on the Bull Arm Fabrication site again today for all the concerned residents. I have signatures on this petition, Your Honour, right from Chapel Arm to Swift Current, Clarenville. I think it's important that we're an integral point in our economy, I guess, on such a big downturn to have such a world-class facility sitting idly.

I understand that we're doing some work there currently about warm stacking and cold stacking. I'm not an expert in the engineering of oil and gas but from my understanding, in layman's terms, that's shutting down our oil and gas industry. That's not encouraging at all for all the people that I represent in the beautiful District of Placentia West - Bellevue, which covers 5,503 square kilometres. It takes in 45 communities with over 11,000 constituents. That's just my district.

If we can avail of this world-class fabrication site, then that gives us an opportunity to bring us to the next level, not only in oil and gas but our economy here in the province. These people never asked me to prepare a petition and have them sign it so that it could fall on deaf ears or anything like that.

Currently, Irving Oil is in the process of purchasing the refinery. My suggestion would be that we talk to them and engage them as soon as possible to find out what their long-term goals are, and maybe they can understand that we'd be willing to work with them to house them at the Bull Arm Fabrication site and they can bring their corporation to another level.

It's an Atlantic province company that we feel they're our partners too, that have been in this province for a long time. I don't think the Irvings are going anywhere any time soon. To have somebody local with that kind of interest in the area ...

I would ask that this Bull Arm Fabrication site and this petition be accepted by the minister to understand that now is the time for talks. We can go on about a pandemic all we want, but we still

need to talk to these companies and let them know how we're going to be coming out of this pandemic and setting up our economy for success.

Like I said, what the people here on this petition are asking for is that we bring this facility at Bull Arm back to a full-fledged facility.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources for a quick response.

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Member has presented this petition in the past, and as I've said, we, on this side of the House and I know throughout the community and I'm sure even the Member opposite will say that we are very supportive of a robust oil and gas industry.

We have done everything possible to ensure growth and development. We have 650 leads of prospects; we have eight new entrants and record bids in our land tenure process. We have made arrangements in Bull Arm through a company to warm and cold stack rigs, Mr. Speaker, to allow us to get into more exploration as quickly as possible, rather than having to do a rig intake process. We will continue to do everything possible to grow the industry.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Day

MR. SPEAKER: It being Wednesday, 3 of the clock, we will now move to the private Member's motion. I'll call on the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port to introduce his resolution standing in his name, Motion 6 on the Order Paper.

MR. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to move the following private Member's resolution: BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House urge the government to table

and bring to debate and concluding votes the 2020-21 budget prior to any general election.

Again, it is seconded by the Member for Windsor Lake.

Mr. Speaker, this is perhaps the first time in memory that the province has been without a budget in the middle of the summer. Instead, we're essentially running on autopilot with an Interim Supply. The difference between Interim supply, of course, and a budget is the level of scrutiny and transparency.

A budget includes line-by-line Estimates that are brought to Estimates Committees, where ministers and officials are questioned in painstaking detail. The House goes through hours of debate over a period of weeks or months, and Members vote on the detailed plan that has been brought before them. By contrast, Interim Supply is a simple bill to provide a chunk of money to the government without any details whatsoever.

Interim Supply is a common provision for the first three months of a fiscal year to cover spending while the House considers the budget. This year, because of the COVID pandemic, we have provided six months of Interim Supply, which is very unusual. The province cannot continue to run on autopilot without a fiscal and economic plan for the year. A budget also includes an Economy document that shows the state of the province's economy, sector by sector, and the plans to drive growth. Employers hit hard by the COVID pandemic are eager to hear about the province's plan to drive growth and position us all to rebound.

We don't know, of course, whether any plans we make could be impacted by a second or a third wave of the virus. No one can predict such things with certainty, but we can provide realistic scenarios and adjust them later if the circumstances require. A sound economic plan is an honest appraisal of the challenges we face and the options for meeting those challenges.

Business leaders are looking to the government for leadership and direction. They are eager to partner in plans for growth, but the first step in building such a partnership is to lay the facts on the table.

Labour unions also want to know where we stand. Their participation in recovery efforts is essential, but the first step in engaging their participation is to be honest with them about the challenges.

Of course, a new leader may argue that he can't do any of this without a fresh mandate. He might argue that he can't bring down a budget without a fresh mandate. While it is 100 per cent true that he will need to seek a mandate within a year, it would be wrong to suggest he needs a fresh mandate to produce a budget. To argue such a thing would be to fundamentally misunderstand the obligations of government.

Every government has an obligation to deliver an annual budget. No premier goes to the people to ask, should we have a budget this year? Of course not. Delivering an annual budget is part of the job. If you run to become premier, you take on that obligation. The people have a right to know the state of the province's finances. The people have a right to know what the government plans to do to live within the fiscal constraints it faces.

Every government has an obligation to respect those rights and deliver the facts and their plan. But to refuse to deliver that plan and use an election as a cover for that failure would be an insult to the people. A failure to deliver, an approach that some would rightly call cowardly. If you are prepared to lead, you must be prepared to take the bold decision to table your plan. If you are afraid to show the people your plan, you do not deserve to lead.

The time for an election will come soon enough. This is a time for the fiscal and economic plan the province needs for this crisis year of 2020. We have found a way to resume the Legislature within the public health constraints of the COVID crisis, so there are no longer any excuses for a delay.

We already know the picture this year will be terribly challenging, but every government has to deal with the challenges it faces on its watch. If a government feels it's not up to the task, it always has the option of stepping down and passing the torch. I don't believe the government opposite is saying it wants to do that.

So the alternative is to step up to the responsibility of governing in these tough times. Is the Opposition going to be tough on you? Are the people going to be tough on you? Of course. When are we not? That goes with the job. But the crisis is upon us and the time for information and planning and action is now. People have questions they need answered, details they need filled in so they can plan the next few months of their lives and to challenge the government if they feel the answers are not adequate.

That is all the more true when the province's fiscal and economic status is under threat. The COVID pandemic has thrown national and provincial economies into a tailspin, ours included, but in times of great crisis planning is all the more important.

A ship in a storm cannot just flail about. It needs a destination and a charted course to get there. That course may need frequent corrections in the months that follow, but having a plan is better than not having one.

We understand that a big reason for this year's delay is that our federal partner, the Trudeau government, has made things particularly difficult for Newfoundland and Labrador. They promise to provide additional monies to help us cope with our fiscal predicament, as they are obligated by the constitution, but apparently they have not told us what monies to expect.

If they had kept their promise five years ago, we might be \$10 billion better off now than we were then. It is outrageous that they broke their word on this. It is outrageous that no federal Liberals held them to account for this, MPs or senators. We all ought to be outraged over this. They have spent five years promising to be fair and they have spent five years breaking that promise. The value of their broken promises have compounded year after year.

The Trudeau Liberals have also been reluctant to help our oil industry, which was battered not just by the pandemic, but also by other pressures; American fracking and glutting the market, the collapse of OPEC, and so forth. There are ultra-green and anti-petroleum idealists around the Trudeau table that have conspired to undermine our province's relatively green offshore oil and gas industry.

Thousands of jobs, at enormous sums of revenue, have been impacted by the pressures crushing our offshore industry, but Ottawa can't seem to get around to stepping up. If it were the Quebec aircraft industry, the Ontario auto industry or Western pipeline, would they be as reluctant to step up? Where are the national voices fighting for Newfoundland and Labrador when we need them? If there are none, then we, as a province, must step up to fill the void by making a noise of our own.

Of course there are the pressures we are experiencing because of the huge cost overruns on the hydro project that Ottawa enabled us to pursue to bring green energy to Eastern Canada, and as a partner and facilitator in that project, Ottawa has a moral obligation to step up. We are still waiting to see what Ottawa will do in terms of fiscal stabilization, oil industry support and rate mitigation.

These are giant holes in the 2020 fiscal and economic plan. Nevertheless, despite Ottawa's failure to behave responsibly, we need to produce the plan sooner rather than later. Frankly, we should not have to cut services or raise taxes because of Ottawa's constitutional obligation to ensure every province is able to provide comparable levels of public services at comparable levels of taxation, even when revenues suddenly fall as our oil revenues have fallen.

A comprehensive fiscal and economic plan could state this clearly and lay at Ottawa's feet the responsibility they bear. With one voice across party lines, we could make a strong and unignorable case, and a budget would be a great place to articulate that.

It might be a particularly harsh message for the political cousins of the Members opposite, and for at least one of the leadership contestants who evidently has – quote – close federal ties, but it's time to be honest and forthright about our circumstances and what it's going to take to deal with them.

We need to put our province's people ahead of partisan loyalty and fight proudly for what's right. This approach has proven to be effective in the past and it can prove to be effective again, now that we most need Ottawa to pay attention.

One thing that concerns us is that the new premier elected at the start of August might want to seek a fresh mandate before telling people exactly what sort of fiscal and economic plan he proposes to impose on them. We believe people have a right to know the plan that government intends to deliver.

If the plan is missing key elements that the federal government ought to be providing, we want to know how loudly and strongly a leader will fight Ottawa for fairness. Will that leader let Ottawa off the hook because of partisan considerations or will that leader put the people of this province first, ahead of party and fight tooth and nail for fairness?

These are the things, Mr. Speaker, that a budget can spell out without mincing words. Denying them a budget means treating voters with contempt. People want to know if the government is leaning towards austerity or leaning towards stimulus. They want to know the new path to fiscal balance and the whittling away of debt. People want to see the numbers. Those numbers are not going to be as pretty as they would have been but for COVID, but people still want to see them and understand where we are.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I usually start off by saying it's a pleasure to speak in the House – and it is, there's absolutely no question about it, but when we're talking about the finances of the province in such an uncertain time, I think it's fair to say every Member of the Legislature has a concern. The people of the province, the business community have concern. This is certainly an unprecedented time and a time of great uncertainty.

Mr. Speaker, in the 48th General Assembly, this government, in 2017, brought forward Bill 65, An Act to Amend the Financial Administration Act. The amendment was something that our government did specifically to prevent us and any future governments from trying to call an

election without giving a fiscal update. The reason that was done, Mr. Speaker, when we saw the election of 2015 without anybody in the election or the general public having a full understanding of the situation the province was in.

Bill 65 read: “This bill would require that, in addition to tabling of Public Accounts on the required date, where a general election is to be held in accordance with the provisions of section 3 of the *House of Assembly Act* other than subsections 3(2) to (5), an unaudited financial report on the financial state of the province be submitted in the same manner as the Public Accounts no less than 15 days before the date fixed for the general election unless, within 3 months of the date fixed for the general election, other indicators of the financial state of the province have been made publicly available.”

So, Mr. Speaker, we as a result of that – that is legislation, it's a bill, it would actually be illegal to call an election without providing a fiscal update to the province, either three months prior to an election, and if that had not occurred, at least 15 days prior to an election.

We made that change specifically to make government more transparent and to avoid a situation where an election was called without an update, as we did see in 2015.

I'd also like to remind everybody in the Chamber of our financial record in this province compared to what had come before us. The deficit in 2015-2016 was \$2.2 billion, and we all acknowledge it would've been significantly higher than that without immediate actions by our government when we took over.

In 2016-2017 we reduced the deficit to \$1.1 billion. That was not easy, to literally cut the deficit in half in one year. Mr. Speaker, it wasn't popular. We faced challenges from the general public and the province because we did that. But government was essentially given direction by lenders, lender syndicate, even by bond rating agencies at the time because the deficit was unsustainable and without immediate and decisive action, as unpopular as it was, the province was absolutely on a crash course.

Mr. Speaker, in 2017-18 we further reduced the budget to \$910.8 million and in 2018-19 we reduced the deficit further to \$552.1 million. Every one of these, Mr. Speaker, is a fact that these are looked at and accounted by the Public Accounts numbers. These are the audited financial statements. They are the true numbers and show the progress that this government has made.

A few weeks ago, Mr. Speaker, I did what the former administration was afraid to do; I delivered a very difficult fiscal update. The 2019-20 fiscal year, based on what we know, looks like a deficit of \$1.1 billion without the Atlantic Accord. We all know that with the Atlantic Accord, we had showed a surplus. The accounting of the Atlantic Accord was done based on accrual accounting and accounting standards signed off on by the Auditor General. When we received the money for the Atlantic Accord, I will point out that I wanted to have that spread over each and every year as opposed to accounting for it in one year, as we were supposed to do and we did.

Mr. Speaker, it is the definition of a setback what we faced this year because it puts us back, essentially, to where we were in 2016-17, not as dire as 2015-16, but obviously not where we wanted to be. This number could change again when Public Accounts are complete, but, Mr. Speaker, I've been honest and forthright about the fact that there is a lot of uncertainty right now so I think it's realistic to admit that to the people of the province.

In that update, I was also very forthright on the fact that we're looking at a very difficult year in 2020-21. I said that we expect most revenues to be down and we expect increases in several expenses across the board. The reason, Mr. Speaker, that I'm not simply tossing around numbers is because I take this job very seriously and I want to be as accurate as possible when speaking about the provincial finances. I won't apologize for that because before the current challenges, we have made significant process against our plan. Our fiscal plan for the last five years has looked inward at how best to manage the government's programs and services. We have balanced that with a focus on investing in people, businesses and sectors with potential for economic growth.

Our plans have been supported through collaboration with stakeholders representing several industry sectors. There were several pillars of how we've worked smarter as a government: shared services, operating reductions, digital government, attrition, post-employment benefits, zero-based budgeting, working with agencies, boards and commissions and that work is far from over.

Mr. Speaker, I can keep talking about the work our government has done and which I'm proud of, but I'd like to bring to the attention of Members, and anybody who may be watching the broadcast, some quotes from others about how hard we've worked, specifically, our bond-rating agencies.

We've been told by our bond-rating agencies that our financial management is a credit positive. We've been told that Muskrat Falls is a downward pressure on our credit rating and the single-largest contingent liability on the province. We've been told that the management of the Treasury is seen as a positive towards our credit ratings.

Mr. Speaker, Standard & Poor's in their most recent report said the following: We view the province's financial management favourably. The ruling Liberal Party was re-elected in 2019, albeit as a minority in the Legislature. We do not believe this will be a significant constraint on the government's ability to enact fiscal policies. That's the one where during COVID or shortly after COVID.

To date, since the last oil price shock in 2014, the government has already acted decisively in implementing a two-pronged fiscal policy response through tax increases and expenditure reductions. Leading up to the current fiscal year, government was on track to meet its target of a balanced – a budget by fiscal 2023.

DBRS, in their most recent rating – and, again, during COVID pandemic – stated: The government set out an ambitious plan in 2016 amid a challenging economic environment. The province's progress in reducing deficits has slowed somewhat relative to DBRS's expectations. While the plan is unlikely to evolve precisely as planned because of underlying volatility in the economy, the

government remains strongly committed to restoring the province's finances.

Moody's, Mr. Speaker, has said Newfoundland and Labrador has demonstrated its ability to set aggressive budget targets and achieve them, which will help guide the province through the current pressure as well. The province successfully lowered the consolidated deficit from 36.9 per cent of revenues in 2015-16 to 7.1 per cent in 2018-19, through the use of revenue and spending measures.

This improvement highlights both the willingness and ability of the province to adjust its revenues and expenditures to meet budget targets. They go on to say, the province's debt management is considered to be strong, keeping debt services costs low and affordable. That's based on the debt that the province had acquired, Mr. Speaker, up to the time we formed government and the deficits we were faced with.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I know that we've received outlook changes due to oil price volatility and COVID-19, and I'm not so naïve as to pretend that everything that the rating agencies say about our situation is positive because even prior to COVID, while we had made significant progress, Mr. Speaker, and that progress had been identified in our bond rating agency reports year over year for the past three years, they've identified the progress we've made, this province still faced the challenges. Because of COVID, because of the spiraling oil prices, Mr. Speaker, those challenges have become significant.

Mr. Speaker, I don't anticipate that our critics would point out our positives. I understand the role of critics in the Legislature, but it is their job, Mr. Speaker, just as it is the job of bond rating agencies, to rate based on the external factors we face and have very little control over.

Mr. Speaker, the fact that our bond rating agencies see us as working hard, as having good treasury management, of having a commitment to fixing this problem is only one reason that we haven't seen major downgrades in recent years. They recognize the work this government has done.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, I have no problem reiterating my position that government will bring forward a budget before an election, when we are in a position to do so. We have a fiscal update from the federal government in July. It looks very likely we'll probably have a budget, federally, by September – or hopefully in September, I'm certainly hoping.

September would be a reasonable date for this province to bring forward a budget, Mr. Speaker. We are more likely to see the federal budget by then, as I've said, we're more likely to see more predictability in the economy, in the outlook for the province, in employment levels for the province. Mr. Speaker, officials in the department say they are more likely to have the ability to provide accurate estimates to the people of the province.

Mr. Speaker, we will not abandon our principles, our strong fiscal management and our approach to providing the public with as accurate a picture as we can when we present our fiscal updates.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

It's indeed a pleasure to get here again today and to represent the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis, like I always do say.

This is an interesting PMR today that we're having here. The discussion is basically about what we're going to do. We need to find out our financial situation.

I spoke yesterday on a motion that was here before the House and a lot of the things that I said yesterday, I'm going to repeat again today.

We're in difficult times, and to be the Minister of Finance in a situation like we find ourselves in right now, I know it's not going to be easy, but that's why we're elected, that's why we're here in this House of Assembly and that's why

people put faith in us to make the decisions on their behalf and make the right decisions.

What we're talking about here today, basically, is to make sure that government – we know there will be a new leader of the Liberal Party in a very short time and under our legislation an election has to be called within a year. That's what has to happen and that's part of legislation. We'd like to see, and what the people in Newfoundland and Labrador, and I'm sure the people in Newfoundland and Labrador would also like to see, is that we make sure we do our part, and a collaborative part.

We're not here just to tear down government and say wrong, wrong, wrong. We're in a difficult situation. We have constituents in every district in this province that are very concerned, not only about their health – health is number one, bar none – but people are worried about the fiscal situation of our province.

It's important, as elected officials and elected representatives, that we represent the people in our districts, that we show them, listen, there are going to hard decisions that are going to have to be made. There are decisions that are going to have to be made that are going to be very difficult. It's difficult times. We spoke on a bill yesterday, a motion in this House, about giving judges raises. In normal times, I think that motion would have went through in flying colours, but we're not in normal times; we're in very difficult times and we have to consider everything. Like I spoke yesterday, a budget to me means making sure that you do the essentials, make sure you take care of the vulnerable people.

Mr. Speaker, I grew up in a good household. I grew up in times when it was good. I had brothers, and sisters and everything else. We never did without, but our parents always did the best for us. I, as a parent, for many years was a single parent and I had to make big decisions. I had to make decisions of how I had to spend the few dollars that I was making at the time to make sure that my children were taken care of. That's something that we all have to do and it's something that we all have to do in our personal lives, is we get a budget and we make sure we take care of our loved ones. That's what we do.

In this House of Assembly, we have the responsibility to take care of the people of the province and do it to the best of our ability. Sometimes, to the best of our ability, decisions have to be made and sometimes these decisions – I've been around this place now since – 2008 was the first budget that I was involved in. Those times were good times. They were great times. I remember one Finance minister said the money was flowing. There were a lot of good expenditures.

When I was here in 2008, our infrastructure demands were so high it was unbelievable. I had schools in my district, when kids walked down the hallway, the squeaking noise interrupted the class underneath them. I had a bridge in Outer Cove that pieces of concrete were falling off it that if it struck a car, it would crush a car. We had to do the bridge. The infrastructure needs back in the late '80s were huge. I don't know the number of schools we built in this province, but we built an awful lot of schools. We built a lot of roads. We did a lot of work.

I'll give examples in my own district of expenditures which made a big difference. The Torbay Bypass Road: At the time it cost, I think it was about \$8 million, and now today I think if you built it, it would probably cost \$30 million because things have gone. But that road, every morning when I used to go to work I'd either make a decision to go early or wait until the school got open in Torbay at 9 because on Piperstock Hill you couldn't get by. Today on the investment that government made because of monies, the expenditures that were there, there's a new Torbay Bypass Road. And it's a great expenditure.

I always talk about education in my district and since I've been elected we have two new schools built: Juniper Ridge school and Holy Trinity Elementary. We've done investments in schools at Cape St. Francis in St. Francis of Assisi. Those are great investments.

I look at a budget and those were monies that were allocated in a budget when times are good. We're going to have to go to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador – and like I said, it's going to be difficult decisions. We'll get in this House of Assembly and hope we'll have the opportunity to debate. That's what we're looking

for here today, is that opportunity to debate a budget and see where the expenditures are.

I'm sure that everyone in this House of Assembly, from the Premier down, would want to see us have a surplus of money so that we could take care of our grandchildren and our children and the most vulnerable people in society. We're going to come into a year that's going to probably be one of the most difficult, and I'd say, they most difficult time in our province probably since Confederation. Since people started sitting in this House of Assembly. There are going to be tough decisions made. We've got to decide how we're going to spend our money and we've got to decide what way we're going to spend our money.

Again, like yesterday, when the motion came down to give an increase to somebody or to a group of people I believe until we do that we have to see what the financial situation of our province is in. I really believe we have to make sure that we know that things that need to be taken care of have to be taken care of.

When I look around this House of Assembly and I look at our new caucus Members that are on this side of the House – and there are a couple of new ones on the other side – and I know that when you first get here, listen, there's a lot you have a lot of ambition, you have a lot of wants and you have a lot of demands that you really wanted to see in your districts. But once you get in here and you realize that, listen, it's all about can we afford to do it and setting priorities. I see it in our caucus, and I'm sure it's in caucuses, both the NDP caucus and the Liberal caucus as well.

We've got to be realistic. And we're going to have to be very realistic when the new budget comes down. But I think the people of Newfoundland and Labrador deserve to see what the financial situation of this province is and to see where we are – they'll judge us. They'll judge us on election day. Whether they judge us on election day in September or they judge us on election day in May, they'll still be the judge and they'll be the people that will decide who does the job and who they wants to move forward to do their job for them.

I have no problem with elections. I've been very successful, I have to say, and I really want to thank the people of the District of Cape St. Francis for giving me that confidence vote that they give me every year. Election time to me, I love it, because I get the opportunity to knock on people's doors, to talk to people, especially our seniors. It seems like when you knock on their door, they wants to haul you in the house and have a yarn with you, but you have to explain to them that you can't stay. Election time is a very exciting time; it's a great time. It's a great time for an MHA to really get to the grassroots and understand what people want and the needs of people and understand their problems.

I really have to say that we're very lucky to live in the province that we live in because our people are so respectful. So respectful when you knock on their doors, so respectful to the way they talk to you. The main thing is you better be respectful back to them too. You have to do that.

We have some huge costs that this province has to look at. We have some huge costs in our health care system. The Minister of Health, he can tell you. Questions were asked of him today about surgeries. I have lots of them. I send him a few emails every now and then on people waiting for cataract surgery, waiting for heart surgery, waiting for hip replacement, stuff like this. Those are the places our investments need to go. Those are the places where we need to be spending our money wisely.

Everyone in Newfoundland and Labrador, you'll hear it all the time – and it doesn't make any difference what side you're on or where the budget is coming from – the people in Newfoundland and Labrador will always say that we have a spending problem. We're going to have a real big spending problem because our revenues are going to be way down.

I was here in 2014-2015 when oil prices went boom, went down, and to see the effect that had on our province and our bottom line at the time was amazing. It was unbelievable; I couldn't believe it myself. Recently, we saw the same thing again. I believe yesterday oil prices were about \$40 a barrel. I would say the Finance Minister and the Premier and everyone in this House of Assembly, we'd like to see \$140 a barrel so we could give the people of our

province the needs and what they want – and needs and wants are two different things; we need to make sure we give them what they need.

People will want everything, but we got to make sure that the needs are there when it come to our health care system, when it comes to our education system. I feel that a new budget is going to have to be adjusted because we're going to see more people needing help – individuals, vulnerable people – with income support. The whole economy, what is happening in Alberta, what's happening in Saskatchewan, what's happening in BC affects what happens in Newfoundland and Labrador.

We always say the key to Newfoundland and Labrador, the heart and soul of our economy is small business, and it is. Small businesses are going to need our help. When we talk about restaurant owners opening a restaurant and you say you can open your restaurant but you're only going to be at 50 per cent capacity. Well most of the restaurants I know, and fast food places and everywhere you go, supertime, lunchtime they have to be booming in order to make a dollar. What's going to happen to those small businesses?

Tourism in our province is huge. The tourism industry, especially in rural Newfoundland – and in my area, too, tourism is huge: bed and breakfasts, tour boats, you name it, down the Southern Shore. I mean it's a huge industry. Anyone that comes around – in the summertime we all take pride in our tourism industries, what we have to offer. We're going to need money for people in our tourism industry.

Stay vacation? I'm going to stay; I'm going to go to Millertown. I'm going to go up and hopefully get my moose like anyone else. I'm going moose hunting. I'm going to stay.

We need to spend money in Newfoundland and Labrador. We need to encourage people in Newfoundland and Labrador to buy local. We need people in Newfoundland and Labrador to ensure that we support each other because that's who we are as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. In times of crisis, we come through. I know in the small community I come from, any time there's a crisis you can count on everyone in that community to come through.

We're in a crisis, there's no doubt about it. This pandemic, the oil prices, everything else is after hitting us in the bank, but I believe as a person in this Legislature, we can get through those. We're going to get through it because we're going to work together, we're going to go forward and make sure that people in our society are taken care of. That's what we're all about. It's about planning.

Sometimes we'll argue in this House and we'll ask government all the time about your plan. Where's the plan? Now is the time that we need to know where the plan is. Where is this budget? Where are we going? There has to be a plan for our health care system, there has to be a plan for our education system and people in this province need to know it.

We came out with a program last week about essential workers and trying to help essential workers. We're going to have to help a lot more workers.

I look at the fishing industry, and we're very lucky this year so far. The crab industry has been very, very good. It's too bad it wasn't the price that it was last year because it would be really, really good, but we have people in the fishing industry we have to be concerned about.

While the federal government came down with a program for harvesters, we have a lot more people in the fishing industry. We have plant workers, we have monitors. We have observers and everybody on the wharf. We have a lot of people working on the wharf that I'm concerned about whether they're going to be able to qualify for unemployment insurance, because we started so late that people couldn't get in. When you talk about a plant worker or a monitor or an observer, they work a little different. They have to get a number of weeks and hours in order to qualify for unemployment insurance.

There are so many different groups in this province we have to be concerned about. I've gone beyond, because I could speak for an hour on this, I know I could, but all I have to say is, listen, we need to show the people of Newfoundland and Labrador that we're going to bring in a budget, we're going to answer their needs and we're going to do our best to give them the future they deserve.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

It's always a pleasure to speak in this House and it's also a pleasure to speak after my colleague from Cape St. Francis because he hit a lot of the important topics today in his remarks. I'll certainly move into my remarks just in a moment, but, first of all, it's always a privilege to represent the people of Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde.

I want to take this opportunity, if you will beg me some leeway, to thank all the essential workers in the district and everybody who helped out: our first responders, our local town council and everybody who did so much during the period we just came through and the period that we're still in. It's really encouraging to see the way that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, not only in the district I represent, but all around the province have taken on this challenge that we face.

Mr. Speaker, I guess I'll start by saying I'm happy today to be voting in favour of this motion. I won't dwell in the past very much, Mr. Speaker, but I will just for context.

On September 28, 2015, I was a Member of this House, and I was a Member actually sitting on that side of the House, and the Premier of today actually wrote a letter to the premier of the day, the premier in 2015, asking for a fiscal update going into an election, which we knew was going to happen that November. And disappointingly so, that response was never given and we went into that election without a fiscal update, and we know where that led to.

We've taken a lot of criticism over the last five years, or going on five years now, for the Budget of 2016. I can tell you as any Member who sat here in this House in 2016, that type of a budget is something that nobody would ever want to do, and I wouldn't wish that on anybody in this House.

That's one of the reasons I'm happy to support this motion today, because never again should we be left in a situation the way that we were left in 2015. Subsequent to that, we actually brought in some changes that mandated that there be a fiscal update, before any election – I think it's six months before any vote in this province – that there would have to be a fiscal update.

That's so important, not only for the government but for the people who want to be in government, because then you have to be responsible in the promises you make. If you have the books, if you have a budget in place, Mr. Speaker, that actually affords you the opportunity – anybody, any leader, any party – affords them the opportunity to make reasonable presumptions going in as to how they would spend that money.

Mr. Speaker, if you think about the election we came through in May of last year, there was a budget in place. Everybody had the opportunity to look at the books and build their platforms accordingly.

I think it's important that as we go into any election that not only do the people with their names on ballots have the opportunity to know the fiscal situation of the province, but so do the people who are voting. They have the opportunity to actually test the platforms of parties and say, well, it's very easy to promise things but what's your fiscal capacity to deliver? If that fiscal capacity is there, that it's not able to deliver, it makes for a more informed voter, and I would agree it puts all parties on a much more level platform going into an election.

Again, that's why I'll be supporting this today, and as a caucus we will be supporting this motion today – as we did back on March 11. There was a very similar PMR on March 11 of this spring, brought in by the Official Opposition, asking the government to deliver a 2020 budget at the usual time in the spring prior to a general election. So, unfortunately, that was days before we really entered in to the COVID crisis that we found ourselves in but, again, on that private Member's resolution on March 11 of 2020 our caucus supported it as well.

So we've been very consistent in our belief that delivering a budget or at least a fiscal update as we had asked for in 2015 be delivered. So that's important.

The Member for Cape St. Francis brought up a lot of very true remarks or remarks that really hit the situation that we're in today. It's important, because this is a time in our province that I don't think we've ever faced, and I really hope, to the good Lord, we never face again the challenges that we are about to face.

This really is not about political stripe, not about the colour of your party. This is going to have to be one voice and all hands on deck as we move forward with the next budget. It's going to be extremely challenging. The choices are going to be difficult, but they're going to have to be made when you think about the future for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. I'm a parent of two young adults, both at Memorial.

AN HON. MEMBER: Very smart.

MR. CROCKER: Thank you, Sir. They turn after their mom.

Mr. Speaker, just to get back to my remarks. I think about their future and I think about other parents that I interact with on a daily basis with kids all ages along the spectrum of age, and why we actually all get into politics. I don't think for one minute there's anybody in this hon. House or any hon. House that doesn't come here for the right reasons.

We're going to face some challenges. We would never have predicted that we would have the perfect storm that we're facing today along – we have the challenges of COVID, and the health crisis has been immensely challenging. I know the Premier and Minister Haggie and Dr. Fitzgerald have done an amazing job in guiding Newfoundlanders and Labradorians through this crisis. All three of those individuals are certainly to be commended for that effort.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CROCKER: What we've seen in the health crisis with regard to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians pitching in to get us through – through determination and just the nature of

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians – we're going to need the same resolve when it comes to the economy. The same way as we've come through the health crisis – and by no means am I saying the health crisis is over. There are many challenging months ahead.

That is another one of the reasons that I don't feel for one moment we're in a position as a province right now to have a traditional election. It will also bring questions, I think, to the House committee on democratic reform, as to what advancements can we make in getting voting in a lot of ways away from the traditional methods. I think this is another reason, not only for voter engagement but for voter apathy, is to explore new ways, to use new technologies as we go into voting. Certainly, that's not something that could ever be in place for an election in anywhere near the immediate future, for something that we haven't tried as a province for a provincial election.

The economic crisis that we are going to face will also be as challenging, and in some ways maybe more challenging. Because the health crisis, we had good strength, I think, going into it with good leadership.

When you think about the price of oil and what happened to that. Two things; one was COVID, but the other was the breaking away in the OPEC nations and the price war with Russia and Saudi Arabia. It was a perfect storm for this province, one that I'm more than confident we can weather but it's going to be one of those that we're going to have to be all in this together.

The Minister of Finance spoke earlier and he talked about a process that we will, I guess, lay out in the coming months for a budget, and I really look forward to going through that process. I guess I'd be remiss to say I look forward to it because it's not going to be an enjoyable process but it's going to be a necessary process.

We're given an opportunity now where, I guess, we've stripped it back to the foundation. That's where we are as a province, we're back to the foundation, and it's incumbent on us all now to pitch in and find ways to rebuild our economy. We're resilient people, we've seen that in the health care crisis and we will see that in the

economic crisis that we face as we move forward.

There have been many steps. The Government of Canada, the federal government, I think has made very nimble moves to get money, to get immediate economic relief to the people of Canada. I applaud them for that because a lot of the programs that they've instituted over the last three months, certainly under normal circumstances are programs that would take years to develop. Are they perfect? No. No, they're not perfect.

I share the concerns of some of my colleagues I heard here earlier today around the essential worker program and the efforts of our Finance Minister and our Premier on moving the federal government from what was announced as a program that would be a cap at \$2,500 a month, to moving that program and pressuring our federal colleagues to actually move the bar on that program from \$2,500 to \$3,000. That made it open to a lot more people.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there's no way to express the gratitude that we, as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, owe our essential workers and owe our front-line health care workers: our nurses, our doctors, our custodians in those facilities. The work they did to actually protect our most vulnerable is nothing less than heroic.

If you look at Canada as a whole, the last time I heard a number, some 82 per cent of the people in Canada who lost their lives to COVID were in long-term care facilities. The work the workers in our long-term care, in our health system and our service industries did to protect our most vulnerable, again, it's nothing less than heroic.

Again, Mr. Speaker, my time is winding down. I'm very pleased to follow the Member for Cape St. Francis and his remarks about all hands on deck and that we all know the challenges we're going to face, because that's where we are as a province. We're going to have to come in here into this Chamber and have our debates and have our disagreements, but the fundamentals of this will be, at the end of the day, it will be incumbent on all 40 of us elected in this House to come together for the betterment of our province and make those tough decisions together. Because there's not going to be, in my

opinion, appetite for the idea of this debate of: it's your problem, it's my problem. It's just the to and fro on this. We will have that to and fro, but this is going to have to be everybody in looking for those solutions.

Again, I'm very pleased to support this motion today, that the books of this province be certainly put before the people sometime, I guess, late summer, early fall, and be back in here this fall to have an opportunity to vote on a budget that will be an all hands on deck and do what we can to make sure that we build up the foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador once again.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CROSBIE: Mr. Speaker, I thank you and I thank the hon. Members who preceded me in delivering their remarks in a thoughtful to this resolution, an important resolution. I feel honoured to be the seconder of the resolution, as well.

The resolution is "**BE IT RESOLVED** that this Honourable House urge the Government to table and bring to debate and concluding votes the 2020/21 budget prior to any general election."

Mr. Speaker, I had occasion this morning to deliver a letter to two gentlemen who are in the process of seeking the leadership of the Liberal Party of Newfoundland and Labrador and thereby the premiership, of course, because whoever becomes the leader of the party ipso facto becomes the premier. I will take a moment to read the text of the letter into the record of the House: "Gentlemen,

"Congratulations on making the enormous commitment to public service required to seek the leadership of the Liberal Party of Newfoundland and Labrador. The winner will be responsible to lead us as Premier through the most difficult challenges we have ever faced as a province of Canada.

“Many in the public believe that the new Premier plans to call a general election soon after the winner of your leadership contest is announced on August 3.

“Our province is facing a financial catastrophe. We also face grave issues in health care and education which demand the full attention of the new Premier for the balance of this year. The threat of a second wave of infection also looms this fall.

“The public deserves their Premier – their employee – to show up for work on day one and stay at work for the balance of the year instead of hitting the campaign trail. An election before a budget would confirm the worst – the Liberal government is hiding the true state of the financial crisis from the public.

“Any Premier whose first act is to call a snap election in the midst of financial crisis is only in it for himself.

“Any Premier who calls an election this year without grappling with all the issues which demand a fully functioning government would be viewed the same way.

“Accordingly, I ask that you each publically commit to table by September and bring to debate and concluding votes the 2020/21 budget, and that you each publically commit to put your full time attention without interruption by general election, on managing the crisis caused by COVID-19 for at least the balance of 2020.

“Yours respectfully”

What I was just read, Mr. Speaker, is the text of a letter that was delivered to the two candidates this morning.

The scope of the letter was slightly larger than the arguably more narrative scope of the resolution, which focuses on debate and tabling and voting on the budget prior to any general election. That’s very important, Mr. Speaker. In the larger picture, though, a budget is a planning document. It’s an economic document. It’s not merely a disclosure document that shows you what the revenues have been for a given period, what the expenditures have been in a given

period and what the deficit between the two, if any, is.

It is also an economic document that reviews the economy sector by sector and it’s a planning document that sets out the government’s agenda for how the government plans to stimulate growth in the various economic sectors the budget document reviews.

I think we can all agree that any competent review of the economic sectors of this province, undertaken today or for that matter two or three months from now, is going to show in many sectors a very grim picture.

It’s not just a document which tells us revenues and expenditures, which gives us a glimpse into the state of finances of the province, it’s a planning document as well and it tells us how the government of the day plans to spend the money that it has. Choices about how you spend the money you have say a lot about a government. They say a lot about a government because they are value choices. They’re choices as to what the government’s priorities are.

The importance of a budget is more than just an accounting for what money is spent and what money has come in to spend. It’s a statement that gives the public an insight into the government’s values and plans and their plan for, in this particular situation, finding a path out of the dire fiscal and economic circumstances in which we find ourselves, partly as a result of a number of decisions that have accumulated over the years that have added up to a debt and a deficit which would have been daunting regardless but also now, coming on top of that, the back-breaking pressures exerted by the lockdown, which was required in one degree or another to respond adequately from a public health standpoint to the exigencies of the COVID-19 pandemic – pandemic because it’s multi-continental.

So that’s the significance of a budget. It goes beyond just a glimpse into the state of finances, which I believe the hon. Premier has said he’s intending to give us before the end of the summer or before he steps down, I should say, which would be in early August. It goes beyond that glimpse into the fiscal state of the province because, as I say, it’s a document which tells us

what the government's priorities area, therefore what the government's values are and it's a planning document which gives us a glimpse into how the government plans to get us out of the fiscal and economic mess into which we have devolved.

From the point of view – and this may appeal to you, Mr. Speaker – of parliamentary process, it's interesting to consider what a budget is. For this, I'm going to information notes which have been supplied by House staff of this House, actually. The Speaker will be aware that those of us on the Standing Orders Committee went through a process of meeting numerous times in an effort to feel our way along, and come up with and sanction eventually a process by which, in case of necessity, our presence in this House could be facilitated in a virtual way without physically having to be there. In the process, some information notes were generated by the staff of this House, and there's an interesting distinction.

I'm looking at one Information Note. The Analysis says: "Legislatures in the Westminster tradition have responded to physical distancing required by the pandemic in a number of ways, with many making a distinction between **scrutiny proceedings** (questioning) and **substantive proceedings** (where decisions are required, e.g., a vote on a Bill or resolution)."

Mr. Speaker, the note here doesn't say it, but it strikes me that a budget is both of these kinds of proceedings. It's a scrutiny proceeding because you're taking a deep-dive look through the Estimates into the government spending and it's also a substantive proceeding of the House because it requires decisions to be made, e.g., a vote on a bill – the note says – and of course, budgets must be voted on as well.

Very importantly, they're regarded as the classic case of a confidence vote. A government which loses a vote on a budget is universally, I believe, deemed to have lost the confidence of the House and consequences follow from that.

That's the importance of a budget. It has, for many hundreds of years in Parliamentary tradition, been regarded as absolutely key to a system of government that recognizes the supremacy of Parliament, in our case, restrained only by the laws of the Constitution.

As the scrutiny proceedings or questioning, the suggestion is these would include the following: Members' statements, Ministerial Statements, Question Period, Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees, Tabling of Documents, Notices of Motion, Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given and Petitions, and all that will sound very familiar to the Speaker, I'm sure.

Substantive proceedings, which involve deciding things, are proceeding which require a decision or vote of the House. These are thought to be somewhat more complex when you're dealing with the prospect of a virtual proceeding.

There was another Information Note, which explained matters the following way. It listed the background, and one of the bullet points is the need to find a way for "Members to fulfil their parliamentary duties as legislators and to hold the government to account" I'm reading from a document prepared by House staff, not by Opposition research staff. That point is absolutely basic and essential and fundamental to the functioning of a Legislature and the need, the responsibility to hold the government to account.

The analysis goes on and says parliaments around the world, including many within the Westminster system, are exploring ways in which their constitutional duties can continue to be fulfilled during a time where rigorous social distancing and working from home, wherever possible, is required. Core constitutional duties of parliament include: holding the government to account, assenting to finance, passing legislation and representing constituents. These are described as core constitutional duties.

These things are stated as a matter of general understanding and legal scholarship and are not conveniences that Opposition Parties think up because it happens to suit their passing interest of the moment. They are core constitutional responsibilities.

It goes further, this memo by our staff: Oversight and accountability – integral function of a Legislature is to hold government to account. It is an accountability body, not just the legislator acting on behalf of government. Members must also be seen to represent the

interests of their constituents. That's what our research staff have had to say on the matter in the last month.

One other point I'd like to make in response to this resolution about tabling and bringing to debate, including votes on a budget this year and that is I made the larger point, when I read the letter in, about the public interest lying in there not being in fact an election this year at all. Budget, yes, but there are many things for a new premier to deal with and it's going to take months to deal with them or to start to deal with them; in other words, at least the balance of the year.

There will be an election within 12 months of the swearing-in of this new premier in any event. This is not something that would put off an election until four years down the road. No, that's not possible because the legislation, the *House of Assembly Act*, by section 3.1 requires that there be after the swearing-in of a new premier an election not later than 12 months afterward. So we will have a general election soon enough but in the face of the economic and fiscal fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has wrought such destruction to our economy and our public finances, an election within 12 months, but not until a period of time has been put in grappling with the several problems that this province faces will occur.

Mr. Speaker, on those grounds, I support the resolution, as those, I think, who proceeded me do, that the hon. House urge the government to table and bring to debate and concluding votes the 2020-21 budget prior to any general election.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Reid): The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

MR. TRIMPER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I was just listening carefully to the words, it's interesting – and I was reflecting just one week ago when I led the private Member's resolution, and I think I made some words to the effect that the discussion will be very important to look back upon, as I talked about net zero last week

and as the Opposition Party has brought forward the idea of making sure we have a budget tabled in time for catching our fiscal responsibilities with our Interim Supply by the end of September.

The commitments and words here, there is actually not a lot of disagreement, but I think it's important to bring forward a few concepts and a few points to the floor just so we can have a proper consideration.

My colleague, who I know in other lives and so on, representing Stephenville - Port au Port, he talked about the unprecedented nature of the fact that here we are this late in the year and we don't have a budget. In terms of recent memory, he is absolutely correct. I would also suggest that in terms of recent memory it's been a long time since we've had a pandemic grip, not just our economy but the entire world, as it has. So we are, as we've all said, in unprecedented times and it's obviously a great challenges and a great struggle.

I have talked about this little story before so I won't elaborate on it, but I just want to go back because what we, as a province, what the country, what the world has just gone through has been a massive collection of sacrifice to deal with a very serious problem.

When I go back to where so many of my colleagues, and frankly many of the folks in this House of Assembly on both sides, were back in the fall of 2015. I think a very good point was made by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board when he talked about the new legislation that was brought in about ensuring that there is a fiscal update in sufficient time prior to there being an election.

As we walked into that situation – and the Member for Cape St. Francis, he talked about it. He talked about the difficulties they faced in 2014 and 2015 when oil started going down and the challenges that the then Leader of the Opposition, now Premier, had with trying to understand exactly: Where are we, where were we as a province and what were we facing?

So there we are, 14th of December, I've recently been elected. It's pretty interesting; I just left a career in science, now I'm a politician. Boom, now I'm a Cabinet minister. I walk into the

Cabinet room, spending about an hour getting to know my colleagues, and then I remember the Premier distinctly saying: I've got some folks from the Department of Finance going to come in and give us a little chat. And I remember the honeymoon being over. I just recall all that happened. We've all been through roller-coasters; that was definitely a roller-coaster moment.

What happened over the next several months and what happened in this House, this room, so many vivid memories and images. I can remember the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board at the time as she prepared to deliver that infamous 2016 Budget Speech. Many of us were down, actually, in the media room, because she talked a little bit about what was going to go on and we had met as a caucus and we had been briefed on the contents. Certainly, sitting in Cabinet, I was well aware of the days and days of decisions that were made and the horrific news that we were about to deliver everyone.

I remember her saying I need to go catch my breath. I watched her walk out into the parking lot there, a place I call Trimper's trail, and she just was trying to gather her emotions before she came in here. It was probably the quietest Budget Speech ever delivered in this Legislature. I think it's important to reflect back on that time and remember all that happened.

I went through some interesting situations myself, and I reflected back and in preparation for this – and some of my colleagues have talked about it. We all knew this was going to be tough and we all knew we had to make the tough decisions. Again, as with the virus, we said we've got to take it now. We have to make these tough calls, and we did. We set ourselves on a seven-year course; a chart, if you like. The Opposition often asks us for a plan, well, that was a heck of a plan.

We said that in seven years we would get to a fiscal surplus. I've got the numbers in front of me and my colleagues have read them. In the interest of time, I won't go back through them, but, frankly, and I would suggest, we were making very good progress on that plan. The Atlantic Accord is a little aberration, fluctuating oil prices, always an aberration, but if you look

at the targets and then you look at what we achieved, we were doing very, very well thank you. I was looking forward to getting there.

A little side point, you might've met a little while ago my mother-in-law, she came to visit here. She and her husband ran Hong's Take-Out for many years. She didn't fully understand and grasp all that we were dealing with but she knew it was all about money and she knew we needed money. So she presented me, the day after the budget – it was really interesting, the Chinese custom – she presented me with a money tree.

For those of you who have ever been in to my office, in different capacities I've had, I call the money tree, I call it Fiscal. Fiscal is actually getting along. He's four or five years getting old now, and he's into a new pot – thanks to Dianne Randell, she's taking good care – but Fiscal continues to hang in there. She's often asking me about Fiscal and I get the plant and I show it to her.

So in the same way I've been tracking our fiscal performance and then along came this pandemic and it's like, wow, what a setback. All I can say to all my colleagues is that the sacrifices we've made for this virus and the sacrifices we've made to get ourselves back to eliminating this deficit are equally a challenge and have certainly called so much of all of us to move forward.

I'm also always thinking, and coming from a science background, I am a politician so I try to think politically. Some people say: Trimper, you don't – the MHA for Lake Melville, you don't think politically enough. I'll correct myself, Mr. Speaker.

I said, what can they go at us with now? Because we here for this last, almost two hours, have spoken with a great deal of agreement. We all realize where we are. We all realize the tough decisions we have to make but, at the end of the day, you know what? We have kept most of the residents of this province alive through our measures, and that's been a collective, all-party effort. It's something we can all celebrate. It has cost us a lot. It's cost us a lot emotionally, socially and, as we're all focused here today, economically.

I've been doing something quite interesting. As I set up in my kitchen, for these last three months, I kept track of what happened everyday, sort of highlight of events. I have a calendar, and I asked my wife this morning, can you take a photo, please, of the month of March and send it down to me? I'm just reflecting back on some of those things. The other thing that got me thinking about this is, I haven't been down here much in three months and so I disconnected the cable in my place. So I've been watching reruns of the news broadcasts from March and April. Extremely fascinating to see.

If you look at the news broadcasts when we were all sitting here together, for those days in March, if you might remember we adjourned on the 12th, which was the Thursday. We were introduced to Dr. Charlene Fitzgerald; the Minister of Health and Community Services knew her very well. We got to see a superstar, and we knew we were going to be –

AN HON. MEMBER: Janice.

MR. TRIMPER: Janice.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. TRIMPER: Oh my goodness, Charlene is my neighbour. Janice Fitzgerald. Thank you very much for the correction, to my colleague.

I have two female Fitzgeralds in my life. One is a neighbour and head of the NLMA and the other is leading us through this pandemic, and they're both tremendous ladies. Thank you to my colleague. Yes, Dr. Janice Fitzgerald.

It's fascinating to see because I'm thinking, okay, so maybe the Opposition will challenge us with moves we've made during this pandemic. I listened to a gentleman this morning on VOXM. The file was clipped to me and I just happened catch it a little bit. He was feeling some tough situations and he has had some tough times, no question, but he's reflecting, he said, government didn't get on this quick enough. He said, that House of Assembly, they did not move quick enough.

Well, I can recall the chief medical officer standing there before us and saying this is coming. That was, what, a Tuesday or a

Wednesday. We all met here and, well, Saturday, guess what? It's in my backyard, the very first case in Labrador-Grenfell Health, very close to home. I just watched the panic and I was keeping track of reaction over the next couple days, because if you remember, that happened Saturday. My phone, and I bet the phone of everybody in this House, started ringing: close down the schools. Guess what – and the minister is looking at me – Monday, two days later, 48 hours, closing the schools. We moved as fast as we could.

I'm glad I kept that record and I don't need to go through it. Suffice to say that I'm proud of the way we and I'm proud of the way the All-Party Committee worked, in fairness, to supporting everyone in this Legislature.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. TRIMPER: We came together when we needed to and, boy, have we been through some sacrifice, from funerals that were missed, to weddings that have been delayed, to what I think is the toughest – and many of us have talked about it – is the inability to visit loved ones in long-term care or in the hospitals. It's just been probably the most gut-wrenching part of this.

Similarly, folks, I will tell you that budget of 2016, when the minister concluded, you could have heard a pin drop here. I walked out here into the lobby area and there were people saying well done. We have this fiscal thing; we're rooting away. I had to leave. I could only stay there about a minute. I walked over to my department and the deputy minister – and I wanted to put this back on the floor because every now and then I hear somebody challenge me or challenge somebody here on this floor and say: You haven't brutal enough; you should be laying off that civil service.

Well, I can tell you, this guy and many other people watched it happen. To walk across that area and up into my department and watch the deputy minister walk down and tap somebody on the shoulder – can you come with me? They went into the boardroom and there's the representative of the human resources department, the taxis are waiting outside; their careers were over. That was a lot of fun.

That kind of sacrifice and that kind of (inaudible), we lost a lot of good people then and we lost a lot of good people again, I can tell you, in February 2017. I don't want to do back there. We have to stay with the plan.

I welcome everything the Opposition has brought forward. As we've done with this virus, we have to tackle the deficit in the same way. It is an enemy. It will take us down. We have to work together on it.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. COFFIN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate hearing from everyone. I want to let the Member for Lake Melville know that my money tree died and there is a lesson in that, Sir.

My money tree started off much like yours. It came from the grocery store; probably about four inches high and it grew to touch my nine-foot ceilings. Isn't that incredible? I was kind of hoping that perhaps my money tree was indicative of great piles of money and that was not the case. Perhaps the lesson we can learn is maybe if you don't tend to your fiscal circumstances, then they deteriorate and possibly die. But then, of course, you can use them to mulch and start a new money tree, perhaps, so we have lessons abound.

I do appreciate your calendar and your tracking of the things that have happened. Mine is slightly more substantial in book form. I occasionally go back and look at: what has been the response, what has happened and, oh my goodness, that was not four years ago, that was only four weeks ago. I completely concur with you that we are certainly in unprecedented times.

I would like to point out that many of our circumstances are very similar to that of other provinces and other countries in that we're facing a fiscal cliff that have significant ramifications for all of us. We are also facing two other circumstances, one of which is that we

now have an election of a new premier that is forthcoming. I think that provides an extra layer of complication when presenting a budget.

Of course, the implications as we saw in our private Member's resolution, one of the reasons that we want to insist upon this budget is in preparation for a potential election. That adds another layer of complication to our budgeting process, of course, because we all know that there is some politics involved in budgeting. An extra layer of complication there.

Then, if we want to do a little throwback to the Auditor General's reports, because as many of you know, I'm an economist. One of the things that I did was I taught courses on the structure and issues of the Newfoundland economy. For fun – and this made me the most fun economics professor ever I'm sure – I would read aloud from the Public Accounts. I'm not going to reflect on those because I have 15, 12 minutes now and I don't think any of us need that; there will be ample time for it in the future.

We also have a concern about flexibility, accountability and vulnerability. Those are key issues that we do need to address in any budget. I do look forward to seeing how our budget is going to try and address each of those particular issues as we move forward with developing it. I think those are all key things that we do need to keep in mind as we prepare a budget.

Now, I must also say that I do not envy the Minister of Finance. There was a time that perhaps from quite afar I may have, but I'm pretty sure that all 40 of us, not one of us is looking forward to the budget that we are going to see. We all know that our revenues have been drastically reduced and we know that the expectations on our spending have changed dramatically. I will continue to talk about some of those shortly.

What I want to point out is that all 40 of us have a fiduciary duty to the public partners. We are all responsible for ensuring that the needs and the expectations of our constituents – and in some cases, our parties – are reflected accurately and appropriately in our budget. That is a weighty obligation for sure and I think that we all need to be very cautious. When we demand more of the public purse, we are eventually

going to have to stand up and defend those demands. I think we need to do this prudently, wisely and well.

I do commend the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port who brought forward this private Member's resolution. I'm rather pleased that it will solidify some of the answers that we've gotten from some of my questioning from the Finance Minister who was committed that we will have a budget prior to September, prior to Interim Supply running. I do like that we have solidified that.

If I was to – and I wouldn't right now – propose any amendments to that private Member's resolution, I would offer that two other pieces may need to be included in that to have a more fulsome perspective. Not only do we need a budget, we also need a plan. If I was to amend the private Member's resolution I would suggest that we need a very clear fiscal plan and we need to see that manifested in our budget, because as the Member for Windsor Lake did point out, a budget is a reflection of a plan which, of course, is the manifestation of our public policy. That is a key thing that we need to incorporate.

In addition to that amendment, I would have also went so far as to say not only should we not have a general election before a budget; I would like to submit that perhaps we ought not to have a by-election before a budget either. We all know that a by-election is very distracting and can cause all of us to be drawn away from our other duties, which are paramount at this time. I would recommend something to that effect but, again, it is a little too late.

Not only that now, if I was to go back –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MS. COFFIN: Mr. Speaker, I can barely hear myself.

MR. SPEAKER: Sorry.

MS. COFFIN: Thank you.

AN HON. MEMBER: Everyone else can.

MS. COFFIN: Good.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to go on and talk a little bit about that plan. In our plan, what we've seen so far is a very piecemeal response to the pandemic. We seem to have a consultant that is identifying what needs to be addressed, by how much and what measure it will be addressed by.

That has not involved our joint Committee. There doesn't seem to be a clear vision about what that plan is going to be as opposed to a little bit here and a little bit here and a little bit here and a little bit here with no one solid direction to give everybody to whom we are responsible a sense of where our province is going, nor will it give any sense of security or sense of we need to be optimistic for the future. That relationship between plan and budget is absolutely paramount.

One of the key things I would like to see in such a budget is we have some very important things that have been requiring addressing for quite some time now. We have not heard anything about rate mitigation in quite some time. We don't know what's going to happen once our supports for essential workers end. We're not quite sure what's going to happen when all of the supports that have been put in place to help offset some of the negatives that have happened as a result of COVID – we don't know what's going to happen next. So the individuals who are worried about their jobs, the individuals who are worried about paying their mortgages when their mortgage relief has been stopped –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I ask Members to stop the chatter back and forth in the House. I'm having trouble hearing the Member.

MS. COFFIN: Businesses as well need to have some certainty that they can survive once their supports have passed. The people of Newfoundland and Labrador also need to make plans and those plans are often very dependent on the supports that we provide.

If we do not provide a plan sooner and a budget sooner, rather than later, we are going to be at risk of increased out-migration. We are going to

see individuals who are uncertain of what their future holds and they're going to start making decisions that will not include living here in Newfoundland and Labrador. Mr. Speaker, that is one of the things that we must avoid at all costs.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to go into great detail about what we need to demand in the budget or some of the problems that I see coming from the budget, but I would like to just have a glancing conversation about some of the things that will need to be considered. When we talk about Health-in-All-Policies, we know we are going to have additional demands on our budget because we need new procedures and processes in place and we need more PPE put in place. This will cause an increased cost in our health care system.

We have seen, in some instances, 300 and 400 per cent increases in the demand for mental health services. That tells us that we need to continue to spend more money on mental health services. That is an additional demand on our budget as a result of this pandemic and we are going to need to address it.

Here's another little one that's exacerbated an already bad situation: it's the COVID-19. For all of us who have been locked up or who have been in isolation during this pandemic, many of us have gained weight. As we know, obesity is a problem in Newfoundland and Labrador and it is also a contributing factor that can cause trouble recovering from COVID-19. We do not need to make our vulnerable population any more vulnerable than it already is. That will require additional spending.

We have seen that the pandemic has shone a very bright light on vulnerable populations. We see too many individuals who are front-line workers who we realize now that the individual who is in a convenience store providing maybe groceries for an individual who has a very limited income, that person is an essential worker. When we look at what our minimum wage is, it's a little bit embarrassing to think that the person who is the most vulnerable, the person who was on the front lines of our pandemic at the height of the pandemic is making minimum wage.

That person is going to be much more susceptible to catching that virus and that person is likely not protected by any labour legislation. That person is probably covered by Labour Standards and Labour Standards does not have presumptive COVID-19, nor does our workers' comp legislation. There are implications to that and our budget and our plan ought to tie those things back together.

Here's another thing that we've been talking about lately: our tourism industry. Our tourism industry is struggling. That has been the bright light in our economy for a very long time. Mr. Speaker, if we do not have a plan and if we do not have a budget, then it's going to be very hard to tie how do we make our tourism industry – how do we bring the shine back to that jewel if we are not putting the right amount of money into our roads?

We need to be able to coordinate these two pieces together and say: Do we want to highlight Fogo Island or do we want to highlight Rigolet or do we want to highlight Isle aux Morts? If we do, we had better make sure that the roads to each of these areas are going to work. That is why we need a plan and a budget that manifests that plan.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MS. COFFIN: Exactly.

Mr. Speaker, here are some other things that we would like to see when we talk about this budget. Our Interim Supply – we have given the government more than \$4 billion and we have had no accountability on that. In fact, what has happened, as part of this piecemeal approach to pandemic response, we have increased the procurement thresholds that do not require us to go out for tender.

We have no idea now what accountability is going to come with that other than we promise to announce the person who got that contract once it is all over. I think that we need greater accountability in something like that. That, Sir, ought to be included in our budget and in government's accountability to the Legislature because we have allowed it, but also accountability to our constituents and everybody in Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker.

Excellent, I have a whole minute. Here are some other things that we need to address that we have not addressed. These are problems that have existed long before COVID-19 has ever crossed our borders. Mr. Speaker, we have had a problem with Family Courts because on the heels of the oil boom and the great bounty that we receive from that, we also saw an increase in divorces. We saw an increase in drug use. We've seen an increase in gangs. We've also seen a decrease in the affordability of housing. We have an increase in the sex trade and all of these things need to be captured in the budget and addressed clearly because even though they are not bright, shiny things and they are not something that we hear constantly every day, these issues need to be addressed and they are not going away.

Mr. Speaker, my caucus and I resoundingly support this resolution and look forward to a budget.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PARDY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a pleasure to speak on this PMR. It's great we have consensus in the House. That's quite obvious. It's not too often we get consensus in the House but it just shows the merit of the PMR. The PMR states: to table, bring to debate and with concluding votes, so it is the full meal deal.

I went through my first provincial election in the District of Bonavista last year and regardless of political stripe, most people had an issue with a budget not being presented – or tabled I should say – debated and voted on. They also had an issue with an election. The vast majority would like to see a fixed date for an election. I would say that for those people I spoke with, whether it is the Millers in New Bonaventure, the Flemings in Spillars Cove or the Connors in Tickle Cove or Open Hall, then I would say to you I would think they're pleased today with our PMR and we have a consensus.

One thing that the people are unaware of in relation to the budget is that they know we debate it in the House, but I would say to you what they don't know in a lot of cases – and I certainly didn't prior to arriving in in this House last year – was that we have the Estimates where we pour over and scrutinize in each sector of government we have, whether it be in the Fisheries, Education, Health, we go over and question line by line the value in each one.

Another thing important about the budget – and I think as the Leader of the Opposition stated – it's one thing to show the numbers, but we'd like to see what the plan would be. If anybody in business is looking to create revenue, everyone would have a plan. The budget is no different. When the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board rolls out his budget, it will contain a plan that I hope will have investments. One would say: How can you speak of investments when we're looking at the fiscal? But there has to be a plan to come out of a situation that we currently find ourselves in. That is the merit of the budget.

If the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board comes out and says, we are going to invest in our youth, we're going to invest in education, we're going to invest in the wellness of children going forward because we think that is a long-term investment to bring down the \$3.2-billion expenditure in health, that would be a very noble and credible debate and plan. If we have the wellness of our staff that are working with children, if that is of an issue, it is certainly something that would come out in a budget.

There are lots of things that we celebrate and we can celebrate through the budgetary process. I spoke to a worker at OCI. OCI in Bonavista, with 350 workers – none of them essential services; none of them would fall under the essential services, but they were all essential. They produce one million pounds of crab per week. Their payroll for Bonavista is about \$335,000 into the local economy per week. The minister a short time ago talked about the stud market in the upper part of the District of Bonavista. I would say that production, Sexton Lumber, is a great supporter of the economy. So we have things that are working that we

certainly can possibly build upon, extend upon and make it a little more revenue productive.

I would say all those things comes under a budget, not just a presentation of numbers, but it is strictly the presentation and then the debate and listening to as to what the investment and the plans would be going forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: It being quarter to 5, as pursuant to our Standing Orders, I'm going to call on the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port to close the debate.

MR. WAKEHAM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to start by first of all thanking all of the colleagues here in the House of Assembly; people that stood and spoke to this motion. I think there was a lot of commonality in what we all had to say and I think everybody in this House has the best interests of Newfoundland and Labrador first. I think that's what we're all focused on.

I'd also like to thank the Minister of Finance for his commitment that he will indeed bring down a budget in the fall and have it debated and tabled. I'm glad to hear that. Thank you for that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. WAKEHAM: Mr. Speaker, 2020 is not the time for an election. People are concerned about health care; they're concerned about their physical health, their mental health. People are concerned about education and how they can get their children back in school. People are concerned about jobs.

The last labour stats showed a loss of 30,000 jobs in one year. That's huge. That's the impact of the Northern cod moratorium, which cost around 35,000 jobs I believe. When you compare those employed in May of 2019, approximately 231,000, with those employed in May 2020, 201,000, it's approximately a loss of 30,000 jobs. People are concerned about getting back to work.

People are concerned about having to choose between their job and caring for their children. People are concerned about a second wave. People want their government to govern. People want us to work together. People want government to open the books and fully disclose the province's finances.

People are not concerned about an election. We had an election 13 months ago costing approximately \$4.9 million. We don't need a snap election. That \$4.9 million is much better used helping the people of this province recover from this pandemic. Without a new leader, of course, there would be no talk of an election or anything at this time in the time of a pandemic. A crisis is a time for stability and prudent decision-making. 2020 has been a very difficult year. While we have flattened the curve – and as the Minister of Transportation and Works said, crushed it – there is a significant economic uncertainty and a threat of a second wave.

Again, 2020 is not the time for an election. It's the time to get our economy back on track, it's a time to get people back to work and it is the time to deal with the backlog of the health system. As a former health care administrator, I know that our health care system in this province was already very stressed with many demands, long wait times and concerns. I am concerned about how our health care system can recover and be there for the people of our province when they need it.

It is a time to ensure our children can go back to school and have teachers teach. The NLTA recently released a press release that actually talked about the need to get back into the classroom.

It is time to prepare again our health system for a second wave. It is time for a new leader of the Liberal Party to put the people of the province first. 2020 is not the time for an election; it's the time for leadership, it's the time for governing. God guard thee Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

Given the hour of the day and pursuant to our Standing Orders, the House now stands adjourned until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.