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Speaker: Honourable Tom Osborne, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Today I would like to recognize in the Speaker's gallery, Mr. Charles Hapgood – most of you know him as Chuck – he was a Commissionaire here for many years. Mr. Hapgood retired from the Corps of Commissionaires at the end of April.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: He joined the Commissionaires in 1991 following a 28-year career with the Canadian Armed Forces, where he served at various bases in Canada as well as Cyprus and Germany.

In 2001, he was assigned to the House of Assembly and became the Commissionaires' site manager here in 2007, a position he held until his retirement.

We'd like to extend thanks to Mr. Hapgood for his years of service to the House of Assembly and we wish him well, him and his wife, Patricia, a happy and healthy retirement.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: For Members' statements today we have the Members for the Districts of Lewisporte – Twillingate, Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair, Conception Bay East – Bell Island, Placentia West – Bellevue, Virginia Waters – Pleasantville and Topsail – Paradise.

The hon. the Member for Lewisporte – Twillingate.

MR. D. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, this past Saturday, I had the privilege of attending the official opening of the Twillingate, New World Island, Dinner Theatre with other Members of this hon. House.

I have to commend Ernie Watkins and Cathy Brown for the beautiful job they have done in

creating a first-class theatre and on the construction of their new cottages.

It was a full house with 180 people in attendance. There were tourists from six different provinces, various parts of the United States, and other countries. Patrons attending the dinner theatre were served a home cooked meal, choosing from lobster, chicken, salmon or cod.

The Twillingate – New World Island area has some of the greatest actors and singers in the province, and this theatre had everyone tapping their feet, clapping their hands, singing along and laughing throughout the evening.

It is through the creative thinking and financial investment of tourism operators in the area that the industry continues to grow and they have been successful in extending their tourism season.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating Ernie, Cathy and all the tourism operators in the Twillingate area for helping to promote and preserve our great culture.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for the District of Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair.

MS. DEMPSTER: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House to recognize three individuals from my district who have made the most of a valuable opportunity for personal growth.

In September 2010, the first karate club in the Labrador Straits region opened in Pinware. Since that time, a devoted core of students have participated in karate training, attending local tournaments and a competition in St. John's at which they garnered 22 medals for their region.

On May 30, three students of Pinware Karate School were awarded a black belt – a very big achievement within the sport of karate. To earn this honour, they had to demonstrate a high degree of skill and fitness. The three students

were subjected to an arduous serious of workouts, and had to demonstrate eight katas.

They passed this examination with flying colours, demonstrating determination, willpower and devotion to the sport. They made us proud. Obtaining black belt in karate is a prestigious honour, and it is the first time such recognition has been bestowed in the District of Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating Kyle O'Dell, Colton McClean, and Sarah Pike on their remarkable achievement and their noteworthy first for the district.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I stand today to recognize and thank the Kiwanis Club of Bell Island for taking a leadership role in supporting local and provincial organizations. This past weekend the Kiwanis Club on the island took the lead to support the Janeway Telethon by co-ordinating the community's ability to donate to the Janeway. The organization with support from students of St. Augustine's Elementary and St. Michael's High set up hot dog stands where for a donation individuals were given a hot dog as a thank you. The community supported the project by coming to the high school or the ferry terminal to make donations.

I have to note a special 10-year-old young man, Mr. Cody Newell, who for the past number of months donated all the money he received as gifts or chores he had done. Cody arrived at St. Michael's high with a bag of money he had collected in the amount of \$340. The total collected through the hot dog donation stands amounted to \$6,200.

I ask all Members to join me and thank the residents of Bell Island, the Kiwanis Club and Cody.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BROWNE: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to the lives lost and families left behind as a result of one of Canada's worst bus crashes, some-36 years ago.

On May 28, 1980, a bus travelling in Saskatchewan carrying CP Rail workers met a tragic fate. While in transit, the bus was side swiped by a car, falling on its side and then struck by a tanker truck. Twenty-two young men lost their lives, many of them from the Burin Peninsula.

Each year, the community of Rushoon hosts a memorial service and wreath laying in memory of those who lost their lives and in honour of the eight men who survived. Again this year, I was moved to participate in this annual service of remembrance. I thank the organizers and the town for taking on this difficult task to ensure that the memory of these men are never forgotten.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in thanking the organizers of this event and, indeed, in sending our love and prayers to those who survived and the families of those left behind.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Virginia Waters – Pleasantville.

MR. B. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in this hon. House today to recognize Rodney Drover, Principal of Virginia Park Elementary School. He has the honour of being selected as one of four educators to represent Canada, the Canadian Teachers' Association, Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association and the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in Sierra Leone this summer.

Principal Drover will depart, along with the rest of the Project Hope team, for Sierra Leone on July 1, and will spend the month of July working

with approximately 250 teachers. He will facilitate literacy development, helping to provide direction to an educational system that has been devastated by the country's ongoing turmoil.

As part of the team's work in Sierra Leone this summer, they have been trying to figure out a way to honour each and every teacher for their amazing courage, resiliency and optimism they bring to teaching. Their plan is to hand every teacher that participates in the program a written letter offering them hope and support. This project will be called Project Hero.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating Principal Drover, who is in our gallery today, for his hard work and wishing him safe travels in his journey this summer.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Topsail – Paradise.

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

I rise in this hon. House today to recognize the Rotary Club of Avalon Northeast. This club, Mr. Speaker, serves the Towns of Conception Bay South and Paradise and was founded in 1989 and currently has a membership of 38 women and men.

As a result of its collective efforts, this dedicated group has earned a reputation of doing more than expected for a club of its size. The Rotary Club of Avalon Northeast has been instrumental in making significant contributions to the development of Manuels River Hibernia Interpretation Centre, the Topsail Beach Rotary Park, the Rotary Paradise Youth and Community Centre, the Richard Parsons Memorial Park, as well as a number of other very important community projects including the CBS Monument of Honour, CBS Library Early Literacy Program, Lifestyle Clinics, Choices for Youth Momma Moments, Chamberlains Park, Parson's Field and many more.

Mr. Speaker, this club provides the local community with a variety of projects, also

including high school scholarships, the junior achievement and DARE programs.

Mr. Speaker, in reflection of all this, I ask that all hon. Members join me in congratulating and thanking the Rotary Club of Avalon Northeast on its continued efforts and contributions to our communities.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

The Commemoration of the First World War and the Battle of Beaumont-Hamel

MR. SPEAKER: Today for Honour 100, we have the Member for the District of Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will now read into the record the following 40 names of those who lost their lives in the First World War in the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, the Royal Newfoundland Naval Reserve or the Newfoundland Mercantile Marine. This will be followed by a moment of silence.

Lest we forget: Denis Tucker, John Charles Tucker, Joshua Tucker, Walter Tucker, Frank Paine Tuff, Jabez Tuff, James Roy Tuff, Ralph Tulk, Leonard John Tupp, John Turpin, Herbert Twiner, Abram James Twyne, Pearce Upward, Hemnon Vail, Francis J. Vaughan, Joseph Vaughan, Oscar A. Vaughan, John Francis Viscount, Leo Michael Voisey, Richard Patrick Voisey, Herbert Vokey, Philip Vokey, Edgar Wade, Albert F. Wagg, Henry C. Wakely, Douglas Walsh, James Walsh, Michael Walsh, Michael Francis Walsh, Patrick Walsh, Thomas Walsh, Gilbert Walters, Garland Warford, Albert J. Warren, John Henry Warren, Joseph Ross Waterfield, Jonas Watkins, Robert James Watkins, James Pittman Watts, Rupert King Watts.

(Moment of silence.)

MR. SPEAKER: Please be seated.

Statements by Ministers.

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MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Conservation.

MR. TRIMPER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm pleased to rise in this House today to recognize June 5-11 as Canadian Environment Week.

Mr. Speaker, a healthy environment is essential to the physical, social and economic well-being of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador is firmly committed to protecting the environment and my department is undertaking valuable work on many fronts.

Our comprehensive approach to the challenges facing our environment today includes action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, protect natural areas and wetlands, and ensure the sustainability of our flora and fauna, while finding opportunities to capitalize on the emerging green economy.

Mr. Speaker, I know that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador stand behind us in our efforts to protect the environment, and in fact, this morning I met some very inspiring young people who will carry that commitment into the future.

The students at Beachy Cove Elementary School in Portugal Cove-St. Philip's, are future leaders in the field of environmental stewardship, and this morning we signed a proclamation together to launch this special week.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all of my colleagues here in this hon. House to join me in celebrating Canadian Environment Week.

Thank You.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. We join with the government in recognizing June 5 to 11 as Canadian Environment Week. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have always had a close connection to the natural environment. We have a keen appreciate for the land and its well-being. We know that its condition and strength will help determine our physical, social and economic well-being. It's all interconnected, Mr. Speaker.

I encourage everyone, not only during this week, but all year round to find ways to create positive change, inspiring increased environmental stewardship in your own communities and provinces.

This past weekend I had the pleasure of participating in the 3 Hour Challenge in CBS which had a great turnout in protecting our environment.

Together, Mr. Speaker, we can make a difference.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister of an advance copy of his statement. The word environment wasn't even mentioned in the budget, nor was a climate change plan or carbon pricing. The new plan to cut large industry emissions won't come into effect for years. Rare plants are threatened by the layoff of wardens to protect the plants and their habitat. The laws around Muskrat Falls prevent anyone from producing green energy for sale on the Island. A backward move certainly.

I thank environmental activists for their leadership.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

MR. HAGGIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm pleased to rise in this hon. House today to recognize yesterday as National Cancer Survivors Day. With advances in cancer prevention, early detection and treatment, more people are recovering and living longer lives following a cancer diagnosis.

Cancer survivors and their families joined representatives of Eastern Health, the Dr. H. Bliss Murphy Cancer Care Centre, the Canadian Cancer Society, Young Adult Cancer Canada and others at a community walk to celebrate the day.

Our government continues its work in close collaboration with the regional health authorities, school districts and community partners to support programs and policies aimed at prevention. This includes smoking cessation programs, sun safety campaigns and other healthy living initiatives under the *Cancer Control Policy Framework*. Eastern Health's *Cancer Transitions: Moving Beyond Treatment Program* and the Canadian Cancer Society's *Defy Cancer Program* are two more examples of meaningful efforts to support survivors.

National Cancer Survivors Day is a celebration of life. It is an opportunity for survivors to celebrate and acknowledge those who have supported them along the way.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement today. Mr. Speaker, we share in the government as well in congratulating all who have won their battle with cancer. Also, for those who are continuing through treatment and dealing with cancer, we give them our greatest encouragement.

I say to all cancer patients or survivors that once you've been diagnosed, every day after that you are a survivor. I continue, and I encourage them to continue their battle.

I also want to take a moment to thank the Canadian Cancer Society, also the Dr. H. Bliss Murphy Cancer Care society and all other groups that represent and support cancer patients in our province. Mr. Speaker, we know that one particular group, those who represent breast cancer patients and survivors, are very troubled by the recent cuts to the Breast Screening Program. We hope that this is not going to be a new trend for this government.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. As a cancer survivor, I am very thankful to all those in the medical field, including doctors, all levels of nursing, lab techs, researchers, home care workers and more, who have dedicated their lives to treating and curing cancer patients and preventing cancer with passion and compassion.

I also thank all those agencies and groups who have dedicated their work and volunteer time for the same. I thank our families and friends who care for us during these tough times.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize June as Seniors Month in Newfoundland and Labrador. It is a time to show our appreciation for the many

contributions older adults have made, and continue to make, in our province.

My mandate from the Premier includes the development of legislation to create a Seniors' Advocate Office. I am pleased to say that *Budget 2016* provides funding to establish this office. It will be independent of government to report to the House of Assembly, and be a strong voice for seniors and their families as we look to address system-wide issues which impact older adults.

Budget 2016 provides \$63.7 million for the Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement to help eligible low-income seniors, individuals, families and persons with disabilities. We have also increased the Low-Income Seniors' Benefit by \$12.7 million in *Budget 2016*, bringing the total annualized investment in the Seniors' Benefit to \$57.9 million. Many seniors in our province will benefit from these two programs.

We continue to support seniors to live healthy, independent lives while participating fully in their communities.

I ask all Members to join me in celebrating June as Seniors' Month and recognizing the many contributions of seniors throughout our province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement. We join with the government in recognizing June as Seniors' Month in Newfoundland and Labrador. We all appreciate and recognize the tremendous value of our seniors' contributions in our communities and province.

While Seniors' Month is to be celebrated, *Budget 2016* is definitely not. It is through the actions of this government and their choices, seniors will be negatively impacted. The elimination of the adult dental program, the axing of coverage for over-the-counter

medications, increased taxes, higher insurance premiums, increased fuel costs – the list goes on and on.

It's the height of irony that this government would slash funding and programs for seniors while at the same time create an –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. PERRY: – office to advocate for them.

They won't listen to anyone else; I don't know why they think we should believe they'll listen to their advocate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement. We have the fastest aging demographic in the country. We have the highest percentage of seniors on OAS, GIS living in poverty because with rising rents, they have little left to live on. We have seniors begging – begging – for rent supplements. Government has taken away seniors' access to many over-the-counter medications. I am surprised the minister can stand and say we should appreciate seniors, considering what her government is doing to them.

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 Opposition.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Speaker, the Premier stated last week that he would release the Justice report on Nalcor's severance issue.

I ask the Premier: Will you now release all of the documentation related to this matter here in the House of Assembly?

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

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

Certainly, there was an opinion put together by the Department of Justice and Public Safety, which was provided to the Premier's office. That, in turn, led to the involvement of the Auditor General. At this time, the decision will be not to release that opinion due to the implications it may have on solicitor-client privilege.

That information has been provided, along with everything else, to the Auditor General for that review, which we're looking forward to the conclusion of.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Another day in the House and another day we get a little bit more information.

I'll ask the Premier this: All of the documents you provided to Justice, which led to the opinion, will you now table that in the House as you committed to do?

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

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

Certainly, I think that a number of documents have been released to the public now. I'm unsure as to what remains, but the important thing to remember here is as we go through this matter where we're investigating the payment of

severance to Mr. Martin, all information has been provided to the Auditor General so that we can have that report done, and that we look forward to the release of to see what happened there. We look forward to that report. Any information that the AG requires will be provided as soon as the request comes in.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

The Premier has said he'd release the documents here in the House as soon as he could. The Auditor General is on the record as saying that it doesn't interfere with his work that he is doing.

I'll ask the Premier this: You said earlier all of the documents have been provided, then you said they hadn't, and now we're hearing today from your minister they have. Premier, can you confirm that all of the information has now been provided to the Auditor General?

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

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

All information has been provided to the Auditor General, but again, the important thing to remember is if there is other information that the Auditor General requires, he'll certainly make a request for that. Again, this is a process that will take some time.

One of the things that the Auditor General also has the power to do is to question individuals through subpoenas. There are a number of things that will happen throughout this process and if any information is required – I do want to reiterate to the Member opposite that it was certainly never a case of the Auditor General being influenced, but it is certainly a matter of the process being prejudice by the release, especially of the opinion. That's certainly I don't think something that anybody wants, including the Auditor General.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

We know the government has chosen to release certain pieces of information and certain parts of the documentation, but they certainly won't release it all so the people of the province can have a clear understanding about exactly what had taken place here, and now they are saying they're not going to release the information.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to ask the Premier this: We're told that just days before Mr. John Green was appointed by you as interim chair of the board, he created an agreement on Mr. Martin's severance for the Nalcor board. So I ask the Premier: When did you find out that Mr. Green was actually involved in the severance? When did you find it out, Premier?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Green is a knowledgeable, dedicated, experienced board of director. He was on a subsidiary board, the Nalcor Energy Marketing Board. We asked him if he would come from that board to rise to the Nalcor Energy Board, in an interim basis of course. We want to go through the Independent Appointments Commission, which we are in the process of doing, to ensure we have a very full board of directors for Nalcor. He's very experienced. He was working with McInnes Cooper; however, Mr. Speaker, he stepped down from his role with McInnes Cooper to take on this responsibility. As an experienced board member, he would know all about the conflict of interest rules.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

We know the minister now is going to answer for the Premier, but I asked the Premier and we still don't know the answer.

So if the Premier won't answer, maybe the minister will tell us the answer to the question: When did the Premier find out that Mr. Green was involved with the severance agreement?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Green's involvement in any of this work with McInnes Cooper is – with McInnes Cooper and with the board of Nalcor. It wouldn't be with this organization. It wouldn't be with the government.

As I've said, Mr. Green is an experienced, knowledgeable member of the board of directors. He knows what his role is. He took on this responsibility on an interim basis as chair of the board of Nalcor Energy. We're very thankful that he has done that. We look forward to having a new board in place once the Independent Appointments Commission has the opportunity to do its work.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

The minister, who's very quickly gaining the reputation of not answering questions, again has not answered the question. I'm certainly not questioning Mr. Green's qualifications or abilities, Mr. Speaker, to be on the record. I'm certainly not questioning that.

Maybe the Premier can tell us or confirm for us that the interim chair of the board of directors was the individual who provided the legal opinion and wrote the settlement agreement regarding the former CEO of Nalcor. Maybe the Premier can confirm that for us.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, it was subsequent to the appointment of Mr. Green that there was information provided. Mr. Green, as the interim chair of the board of Nalcor right now, certainly he was working with the law firm that was providing advice to the former board of Nalcor at the time. That information was part of the process that he was involved in, as the minister said. He was working with the firm that had been providing advice. We are very pleased that he was able to step up to become the interim board of Nalcor. It's a role that he's played with some of the affiliates and subsidiaries, boards of Nalcor. He's now involved there and is doing his job as interim chair of that board.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

The Premier's question and answer is not completely clear to me, so I'm going to ask him again.

Are you saying that you didn't find out or you did know that he provided the advice at the time that you appointed him as chair?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The appointment of the – I have not spoken to Mr. Green prior to his appointment or since his appointment really. This is an appointment that actually occurs that we allow and of course we expect our ministers to occur – to be involved in. This is what happened here.

I was not directly involved with Mr. Green before or after and I have no intention to be. He now sits as the interim chair. We look forward to the Independent Appointments Commission to get the new board in place as quickly as possible. This will be on a permanent basis.

That's the process that's been outlined there in his former capacity as a lawyer that was providing advice to the former board of Nalcor.

That is what he did. We have reached out to government to ask and invite Mr. Green to come in an interim role. That is exactly what he's done.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

The Premier says he leaves it with his minister, so I'll ask the minister if she knew that Mr. Green had created the agreement and provided the legal opinion before he was appointed as interim chair of the board.

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On April 21, we were pleased to be able to put in place an interim board of directors with Mr. Green as chair. We've all recognized, including the Leader of the Opposition, that he's an experienced, dedicated board member.

His role with McInnes group or what he had done previously to that, we did not discuss it. Obviously, we discussed the fact around the conflict of interest. He stepped down from his role at McInnes Cooper and we are very pleased to have him as the interim chair of the board of Nalcor Energy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'm sure the Auditor General will look deeper into that matter.

Mr. Speaker, at 3 o'clock this morning posters asking for the resignation of the Premier were removed from the Parkway.

I ask the Premier: Were employees of the provincial government instructed to remove these posters calling for your resignation?

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Member for the question. Obviously, this morning it was an operational decision to remove those signs. It's certainly not something that we – as a minister, I had discussion with. There are hundreds of operational decisions made on a daily basis throughout the Transportation and Works Department.

Obviously, Mr. Speaker, as well, the first that I noticed that it had happened was through a media inquiry this morning. Immediately we checked into that situation. Obviously, the direction did not come from me as minister. Had it come to my level, the decision might have been different than what it was.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I thank the minister for his answer.

So, Minister, are you confirming that taxpayers' dollars were used to remove these political posters in the middle of the night?

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

MR. HAWKINS: Mr. Speaker, as I said, it's an operational decision. We make hundreds of operational decisions on a daily basis. There is money expended on operations.

In this particular case, there have been signs that had previously been put around the park area in the past that has been removed. So this is not different. As a matter of fact, it was contracted out with a different contractor to remove them.

Again, as I said, it was not a decision that came from me as minister. Had it gotten to my level,

the decision might have been different, but it was removed. It's a practice that has happened in the past, so that is no different today than what happened in the past.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'll ask the minister: Who made the decision and who gave the direction?

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

MR. HAWKINS: Mr. Speaker, I think it was pretty clear where it came from. It was an operational decision. We made hundreds of operational decisions in Transportation and Works on a daily basis. Many of them, unless they are of a high-level nature, never, ever get to the ministerial level. I have to tell you, Mr. Speaker, this one did not get to a ministerial level. It was a decision that was made – it's an operational decision.

If I remember correctly, I have not been around this table for very long, but I know in the past there have been decisions made, there have been signs that have been put around the park area that have been removed. I would suspect this was no different. It was a decision that non-executive level members decided last night to have those removed.

Again, it was not a ministerial decision, neither was it a Premier's decision. It's a decision that was made on an operational level. That's the way it is.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, according to the Canadian taxpayers' association, Newfoundland and Labrador is the most expensive place in the country to drive.

I ask the Minister of Finance: What is the maximum price you're willing to allow the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to pay?

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

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

As we discussed in this House last week during the debate around the changes that were made to the gas tax, we are faced with an unprecedented situation in this province, a \$1.8 billion deficit that would have been \$2.7 billion had we not taken any action. It was the decision of this government to implement gas tax changes.

As I mentioned in this House last week and actually shared with Members opposite, we have a system in place in the Department of Finance to provide information to me on a weekly basis. Last week when the prices were changed, my understanding from officials is that the price actually was a half a cent higher than the five-year average, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the minister indicated last week in debate there was discussion about a regulatory regime put in place to cap gas price. What process was looked at and why, at the end, could it not be implemented?

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, when I spoke here in the House last week and as I will certainly say here in response to the Member opposite's question, our government made the very difficult decision to increase gas tax. It is our intention to monitor the situation throughout the summer. This was always a temporary decision, as we announced in the budget. We have made it clear to the people of the province that we will review where the tax increase would put gas prices as a whole in the province, and we

would look to make changes hopefully in time for the supplemental budget in the fall.

However, I had also confirmed in this House that should we see something unprecedented happen with gas prices, Cabinet holds the accountability to be able to make a decision and we will.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, again to the minister, I just want to clarify, last week in debate she said they viewed a regulatory regime to cap gas price, but she said the process couldn't be implemented. I ask her what was the regulatory regime you looked at and why couldn't it be implemented?

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Sorry to the Member opposite, I was having difficulty hearing you when you asked a question a couple of minutes ago.

What I referred to last week was we had actually looked at whether or not we could create a mechanism inside the legislation or in regulatory terms where we could have a gas tax that would float as the foundational price of gas changed. As the Member opposite may know, gas is actually a combination of a number of items, not the least of which is the price of crude.

We looked at that alternative and from a legislative perspective, we were told that that wouldn't be a feasible option so we made sure we put other mechanisms in place, which is confirming that Cabinet can make a decision. As long as we reduce the tax under 16½ cents, we have the ability to do that, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, federal Minister Foote suggests that negotiations on the deferral of the equalization payments started merely a week before the announcement, but the Minister of Finance publicly stated that it began in December.

I ask the Premier: Who is correct and when did the actual negotiations begin?

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in this House, we had discussions that I was present for with federal Minister Morneau back in February. I can provide the Member opposite with the exact date. It would have been during the Northern Lights Conference.

During that conversation, we had a discussion with him on a long list of items that are very important to our province. We were very pleased with the federal government's decision to defer the equalization repayment, one that the former government saw fit to take that obligation on this year and we didn't agree with that. We'll certainly be looking forward the fruits of the other conversations we've been having with our federal counterparts.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I say to the hon. minister – I may be incorrect – I thought I heard her on a night line show indicating that in December there were meetings and in January there were meetings as well, and that's when the actual negotiation began.

I ask the Minister of Finance: How much was paid on the equalization repayment loans just negotiated and started with the federal government to defer the payments?

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, I can provide the Member opposite with the exact amounts. The payment structure is such that I understand that payments are retained by the federal government from other funds that we pay the federal government. There have been two payments, my understanding is. Those payments will not be reimbursed to the province, but the federal government has pushed forward the remaining amount, and we are certainly going to be taking advantage of that extra cash.

I'm really pleased that we are able to put in that Deficit Levy and respond to the needs and concerns of the people of the province, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Mr. Speaker, if the Premier and Minister of Finance knew they were negotiating with Ottawa to defer payments, and they've made payments since, why would you have gone through that process? Why wouldn't you have included that in your budget if, in fact, the discussions started back in December and January?

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, the answer is quite simple. We wanted to make sure that we weren't counting our eggs before they hatched. It is important that in a negotiation you make sure that you have the details completed. And in this particular case, as soon as the information was confirmed through the federal government and in communications with the provincial government, we were able to act on it.

When we completed the budget, at that time, we did not have clarity, nor did we feel it would be

prudent to reflect anything like that in the budget. That's why we were very pleased, as soon as we found out the information, that we went to the people of the province and shared the information with them.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: Bill 35 will be debated in the House of Assembly this afternoon.

I ask the Minister of Seniors and Wellness: Based on research, is vaping a safe alternative to smoking that actually can help people quit smoking and reduce their risk of illness?

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

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Speaker, we don't know the long-term effects yet. There's been a significant amount of research done. Our objective is to protect the public and protect the health. We're putting in place a bill that is going to do just that. The research will be completed and continue to be completed. This will also be debated later on today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: Last year, the House of Commons received a report on vaping. It recommended collaborative action between Ottawa and all the provinces.

I ask the minister: Can you provide an update on what action has been taken to date with this report?

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

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Speaker, we are going to continue to work with the federal government as we move this legislation forward. In actual fact, on May 19, 2015, the now Leader

of the Opposition said that their plan was to bring this legislation to the House of Assembly. They also did a comprehensive review, so we've continued with that review.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I ask the Minister of Transportation and Works: What private contractor was used for his Parkway poster patrol overnight?

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the hon. Member for his question, even though it was a little bit slighted and slanted. As I mentioned previously, our workers, following practice – it is within a park. They were following practice as been – historically they have removed signs. It's not something new.

So what they did last night, Mr. Speaker, is what they've done previously as a practice in removing signs within the park. I understand that there are other signs throughout the city that are still on the posts. It was removed in the park.

As I said before to the hon. Member, there was nothing that came to my level on that as a decision. As I said before, if it had, it might have been a different decision. I don't know really the policy, whether they should be removed or not, but that's something I will look into, Mr. Speaker (inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, the minister is saying it's a historic practice to hire a private contractor in the middle of the night to go out and remove posters on the Parkway. There are still some of those signs up at the top of Allandale Road in

the park. Prince Philip Parkway is maintained by the City of St. John's.

Why would government hire a private contractor that remains unnamed to remove posters in the middle of the night?

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

MR. HAWKINS: Mr. Speaker, again, as I said, this was an operational decision that was made on an operational level, and they were following what they have normally followed. It is not uncommon to have contracting to do some of the work.

Last night, the same thing happened with regard to this particular situation. My department, the officials within that department making operational decisions on a daily basis, not uncommon to do that, decided that would be a course of action they took. They did not move it up to the level of ministerial, which I'm assuming they would have thought they were doing okay because it was practice in the past to be able to do that.

So as a result of that, Mr. Speaker, when it came to my attention this morning from the media request, it was an area I wanted to look into. And as a result of that I am answering today as truthfully and honestly as I possibly can.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KENT: So, Mr. Speaker, the minister is throwing officials under the bus, or in this case, under a white van.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier: Who in your office directed that the posters come down? Was it Kelvin Parsons, or was it someone else?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, as was previously mentioned by the minister, this was an operational issue. I can assure Members opposite and Members in all parties of this House of Assembly, as the minister just mentioned already, there was no one from the Premier's office that was involved in this at all. Simply, it was an operational issue.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, as of this morning, over 12,000 people have signed a petition calling for the Premier to resign immediately. Due to antiquated rules in this House, an online petition cannot be presented.

Will the Government House Leader commit to addressing this issue when our Standing Orders Committee meets this summer?

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, certainly, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to changing a number of the Standing Orders to allow the Member opposite to tweet freely in this House of Assembly –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. A. PARSONS: – and certainly we look forward to making a number of changes that the previous administration had 12 years to do and did absolutely nothing about during their 12 years in government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to come back to the Minister of Transportation and Works with regard to this work in the middle of the night. We can't even

get our roads plowed in winter in the middle of the night.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. MICHAEL: I ask him: How can he justify this action happening in the middle of the night?

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Member for the question. As I said, and stated before, this was an operational decision that was made last night.

Subsequent to the question the other hon. Member made in reference to the fact that we're throwing our workers under the white van. That is totally uncalled for, totally inappropriate. We respect and we regard our workers, whether they're our employees, whether they're our contractors who are doing work on our behalf. They are number one, Mr. Speaker, and we certainly recognize them.

So the decision that was made was an operational decision. As I said before, it did not come to a ministerial level. As a result of that, Mr. Speaker, I did not make that decision, nor did the Premier's office make that decision. If it had come to me, Mr. Speaker, I might have made a different decision.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I say to the minister, what's disgraceful is people's freedom of expression has been taken away from them. That's what's disgraceful.

I ask the Minister of Transportation and Works: Will he tell this House what company was contracted and how much did it cost in the middle of the night to have those posters taken down?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will certainly answer the question. We did have a contractor. It is a contractor that does work for us on a regular basis. The cost was somewhere around \$200 to remove those signs. That's the amount that was expended on that last night, Mr. Speaker, or early this morning.

Again, from my department, from where I'm looking at it, my understanding is there's not a policy we have within government. That's something we need to look at. I know previously, and I think that's why the employees reacted as they did, because it has been past practice that when signs have gone up around the park area, they have removed them. I think it's a practice they've done in the past.

With all due respect, Mr. Speaker, I think the employees acted on what they did before. I respect that decision and I will certainly work with them as we –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I ask the Minister of Transportation and Works: Will he bring into this room and table the receipt that shows the name of the contractor, the bill and the receipt showing how much money was asked for and paid?

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

MR. HAWKINS: Mr. Speaker, I don't think that's going to be a big issue. I think we are transparent. We are open. We make sure that any expenditures are there. I, personally, have absolutely no problem with doing that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'm asking the Premier now: Did he or anyone involved in any way with his office direct or have anything to do with the removal of protest signs from light poles early this morning in the vicinity of the Confederation Building?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously, I just answered that question to some Members opposite. No, no one was involved from the Premier's office in the poster removal on the Parkway or in Pippy Park last night. That was not a decision that came from the Premier's office. It was an operational issue, as the minister just clearly pointed out. So the answer simply is no one from the Premier's office was involved in the removal of those posters last night.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I ask the Premier: Does he not have a problem with an order to have work like this done in the middle of the night when we can't even clear our highways in the middle of the night in winter?

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I don't know why it's so difficult in the middle of the night. I mean work is done in the middle of the night all over the province. As a matter of fact, with the 24-hour snow clearing –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I've ruled in the House on several occasions that the only Member that I wish to hear speaking is the Member recognized to speak.

The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With regard to the 24-hour snow clearing, that's an implementation that has not happened yet. It's something that will be happening next winter. Again, it's measures that are taken. We have been very clear in this House, and given the rationale – and we've been open and we've been clear and we communicated that. We realize there are only certain areas of the province that had 24 hours. I'm sure the hon. Member opposite will be concerned about rural Newfoundland, and all the other areas of the province that don't get 24-hour snow clearing. I'm sure she's speaking about that.

So, Mr. Speaker, that's just an area we're looking at and we will continue to follow through on that commitment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

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

MR. FINN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Natural Resources, the following private Member's resolution:

WHEREAS Terry Fox began his Marathon of Hope on April 12, 1980, in St. John's,

Newfoundland and Labrador with a dream of creating awareness of cancer and raising \$1 million to find a cure; and

WHEREAS Terry Fox at the age of 21, and having had a leg amputated due to bone cancer, endeavoured to run across Canada covering 5,373 kilometres over 143 days, the equivalent of a 42-kilometre marathon each day until he was forced to stop due to a recurrence of cancer; and

WHEREAS after the first 25 days, and with growing encouragement from residents along the way, Terry Fox stopped in Channel-Port aux Basques where that town alone raised \$10,000; and

WHEREAS the generous people and response from the people in Port aux Basques fired his imagination and a new fundraising goal of \$1 for every Canadian was set; and

WHEREAS in the past 36 years, more than \$650 million has been raised in Terry Fox's name to support cancer research; and

WHEREAS Terry Fox and his family continue to be an inspiration to school children and communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada and the world; and

WHEREAS Terry Fox's courageous journey began in Newfoundland and Labrador and gave his dream a momentum that endures;

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED that this hon. House supports the second Sunday after Labour Day in each year throughout Newfoundland and Labrador to be proclaimed as Terry Fox Day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Pursuant to Standing Order 63, the private Member's resolution just entered by the Member shall be the one to be debated this Wednesday.

Also, pursuant to Standing Order 11, I move that this House do not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, June 7.

Further pursuant to Standing Order 11, I move that this House not adjourn at 10 p.m. on Tuesday, June 7.

MR. SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given

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

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

I'm not sure this is appropriate, but the Member opposite, the Member for Ferryland asked me a question during Question Period and I just had the information now. The amount of the equalization repayment that was paid in February was \$4.5 million. I wanted to provide that information to the Member.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Further answers to questions for which notice has been given?

Petitions.

Petitions

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS a Deficit Reduction Levy is an extremely regressive surtax, placing a higher tax burden on low- and middle-income taxpayers; and

WHEREAS surtaxes are typically levied on the highest income earners only, as currently demonstrated in other provinces, as well as Australia, Norway and other countries; and

WHEREAS government states in 2016 provincial budget that the personal income tax schedule needs to be revised and promises to do so;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to ensure that the Deficit Reduction Levy be eliminated and any replacement measure be based on progressive taxation principles, and that an independent review of the Newfoundland and Labrador provincial income tax system begin immediately to make it fairer to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I have at least 300 signatures again here on this petition that people have filled out and that they have mailed to our offices. Here we have people from Bay de Verde, Botwood, Peterview, a number of places here in the province – Westport.

Mr. Speaker, people are saying that they want an overall review of our taxation system and of fees that are levied against the people of the province. People know that the levy that government put through this budget was a knee-jerk reaction. It wasn't well thought out because we can see how government has partially repealed some of that levy; that they've moved up the income ladder in terms of who now will pay the levy.

It's not now until you reach over \$50,000 a year as an earner that your amount for the levy will be reduced. It just goes to show how ill-thought-out the whole approach to progressive taxation was for the people of the province, how ill-thought-out the levy was, and now government is just going to take parts of the levy away. Really, what they're doing is tax reform on the fly.

Mr. Speaker, that's not what we need as a province. We all know how incredibly difficult

the fiscal situation is for the province, nobody is denying that, but to do this piecemeal in this way now is showing that government has no control, no plan and no strategy (a) on how to deal with the revenue crisis that the province has, which also part of this revenue crisis is an employment crisis because we have the highest unemployment in the whole country and it's growing.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS the education of our children is the most important and vital investment that can be made in the success of our children; and

WHEREAS the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador should be choosing educational options that will provide all students of our province with a higher standard of education and enhance learning for our youth; and

WHEREAS the government's decision to make cuts to teachers and to our educational system will have a negative effect on the students;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to reverse this decision effectively immediately.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, that's a portion of the petitions I received from my district, various school groups, addressing their concerns. They come to me and they brought me in ever so many petitions, so I've presented a chunk of them here.

Their concerns, I narrowed it into a broader comment, because their concerns are Intensive Core French. It's the cutback on teachers; the implementation of full-day kindergarten where schools in my district are struggling with capacity issues wondering if they're going to be ready; multigrade teaching – the full gamut of educational costs and effects to education are being expressed by concerned parents and educators in my district.

Colleagues of mine have presented similar petitions from their districts. So this is not just a certain area, this is across the province that people are speaking out, and they're speaking out en masse. This is a fairly large group – CBS is a fairly large town, one of the largest towns in the province. So you're looking at even a larger subsection and this is right from one end to the other, and it includes the Member for Harbour Main's District, people from her district, and as well as my colleague, Topsail – Paradise.

These cuts, people have a lot of concerns. We get up in the House day after day after day and express those concerns. They seem to be going unanswered or on deaf ears, but people are speaking out. We're bringing their voice to the House of Assembly, which is never a bad thing to do. Unfortunately it seems like a lot of it is going on deaf ears, but I don't really believe, regardless if they decide to ignore us, the voice of the people overrules all the rest of our voices.

My one voice here today, Mr. Speaker, is speaking for hundreds in my District of Conception Bay South, so I do call upon government to start paying attention to these individual concerns throughout the province.

Thank you very much.

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

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

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

WHEREAS for 70 years, the Pouch Cove library has been the centre of the community; and

WHEREAS the Pouch Cove library offers a variety of services in addition to loaning books; and

WHEREAS the services are used by a large portion of the residents of Pouch Cove, many seniors and young families;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the government to immediately direct the Provincial Information and Library Resources Board to reverse the decision to close the Pouch Cove library.

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

Mr. Speaker, the Pouch Cove library is, like the petition says, a central part of the community. The council in Pouch Cove saw the value of the library and for the last number of years has been putting resources into the library for extra hours because they realize that there is so many people in the community using it. They had an after-school program that the town itself gave the money to keep the library going, just to pay for that.

This library is in the municipal building, so they don't pay any light. They pay no snow clearing. Like I said, it's in the building, so the town already pays for all this. It is a very small cost but a large cost to the Town of Pouch Cove to continue to keep it going.

I spoke to people in the library area there and they tell me that it's not only the people, young people, but they find that there are a lot of seniors that come in there and they need some direction. Today, we know that there are a lot of things done online and you can get a lot of information. Seniors want to know how to do this and how things can be done, and they use the library to get this information and to just navigate through the different systems.

The librarian is there all the time to assist. It's a huge part of this community. There is also a program there for preschoolers, grandparents and parents and they take their children there in

the morning to go through a program where they read to the children. This library is one of the more used libraries in the whole province. The community really uses it.

I can't understand why government are doing this to the province for such a small cost. I urge government, please, to reconsider what you're doing to rural Newfoundland and these small libraries that are so vital to our communities.

Thank you very much.

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

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

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

WHEREAS government has once again cut the library's budget, forcing the closure of 54 libraries; and

WHEREAS libraries are often the backbone of their communities, especially for those with little access to government services where they offer learning opportunities and computer access; and

WHEREAS libraries and librarians are critical in efforts to improve the province's literacy levels which are among the lowest in Canada; and

WHEREAS already strapped municipalities are not in the position to take over the operation and cost of libraries;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to keep these libraries open and work on a long-term plan to strengthen the library system.

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

Mr. Speaker, today, the petition I have in my hand has been signed by petitioners from CBS, from Torbay, from the Southern Shore, Mount Pearl, Portugal Cove, all over the greater St.

John's area and beyond, Flatrock as well. People are concerned at the really backward move this government has taken.

Mr. Speaker, in developing countries they put so much effort into having books available and library services available to people. In many places they have little trucks that go around with mobile libraries because they consider libraries so important, especially for literacy and for growth of their economy, growth of who they are as a people.

You also have in small villages, from village to village, carts drawn by animals. I've seen them. I've seen the stories in some of the organizations that raise money for developing countries. The effort they put into having books available to their people is unheard of. Here we are doing this backwards step of closing libraries.

In debate the other night when a lot of people may not have been following, I quoted from an article that was in *The Globe and Mail* by Professor Riddell from Queen's University where she talked about libraries today are not being closed because of –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: (Inaudible).

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

MS. MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I appreciate that as I try to bring forward concerns of the people of the province.

Professor Riddell pointed out that the new age we're moving into is not a reason for closing libraries. As a matter fact, they have a role to play in our digital literacy and that as individuals and as a society.

She actually says in the article that it is absolutely wrong. It is erroneous to indicate that libraries need to close because they are no longer needed. They are needed even more so now because of many people in rural areas not having access to Internet and to the digital life they have to take part in.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: The hon. the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island.

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS the current 2016 provincial budget impacts adversely and directly the education programs of Beachy Cove Elementary in Portugal Cove-St. Philip's; and

WHEREAS parents request a delay in the implementation of full-day kindergarten at the school until September when, at such time, the new five to nine school in Portugal Cove-St. Philip's will be open; and

WHEREAS the student population of Beachy Cove Elementary is growing exponentially and this growth is sustainable into the future; and

WHEREAS parents request the reinstatement of the previous teacher allocation formula for Beachy Cove Elementary for this year and subsequent school years to service the growth in enrolment and to be able to provide all students with equal opportunity to enrol in the French immersion program;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to reinstate the previous teacher allocations and delay the implementation of full-day kindergarten in order to provide the children of Beachy Cove Elementary the right to a quality education.

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

Mr. Speaker, I've presented this on numerous occasions, and had the privilege of a number of parents and some of the students from Beachy Cove being in this House of Assembly and being part of the protests for the I love education process. They continuously outline the fact that

this is going to be detrimental to the education process, not only in Beachy Cove Elementary, because they realize they're speaking for all students in this province.

They're outlining the concerns that parents have, educators have and former educators have. They're asking about a number of things here; one, the delay of implementing around issues because of the costing. Being able to use that money to be better invested in reducing the class caps, and ensuring that access to specialized programs, particularly around the intensive French immersion, is part and parcel of it and that, as a result the use of gymnasiums and cafeterias then could be freed up for proper use; also around busing issues and the challenges around that being added.

They've even in the discussions – and I've had the privilege of talking to some of the people connected to the School Lunch Program and the challenges they're going to face. So we're going to impose an added number of students in the school system with an expectation that parents have and the school system have that these kids for lunchtime are taken care of. Now there are no resources for a volunteer organization – and I have to stress that, a volunteer organization – which took a lead in this province over the last decade to ensure students, no matter of their economic situation, had nutritious foods while they're in school.

We all know, and every bit of research will tell you, that if a kid is hungry in school there are challenges around their education. There are challenges for them because they can't focus. It makes every sense in the world. As part of that process, we're encouraging – and the students and the parents at Beachy Cove Elementary are noting that.

There are also a number of issues – and I read a piece in the paper this past weekend from a former superintendent of a school board where he questions the integration of classrooms. He talks about are we now going to base the scoring achievements on the present system where it was a one-grade system or is it going to be changed and lowered. That's not acceptable here. I'll have an opportunity to speak to this again in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Before I recognize the hon. the Government House Leader, we had a message sent up from the Broadcast Centre. Some Members apparently when they're speaking are stepping slightly away from their mics, and it's not possible for the Broadcast Centre to pick up the volume and have it properly broadcast. So I remind Members to try and speak toward your mic.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: I was going to say – thank you, Mr. Speaker – certainly no complaints from us, depending on who that speaker was.

I would call from the Order Paper, Order 3, third reading of Bill 23.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 33 be now read a third time.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion that Bill 33 be read a third time?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

MR. A. PARSONS: If I could just clarify, I think I called Bill 23.

MR. SPEAKER: Sorry, Bill 23. Order 3, Bill 23, you're correct.

Bill 23.

CLERK (Barnes): A bill, An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act No. 6. (Bill 23)

MR. SPEAKER: Bill 23 has now been read a third time and it is ordered that the bill do pass and its title be as on the Order Paper.

On motion, a bill, "An Act To Amend The Revenue Administration Act No. 6," read a third

time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 23)

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 4, third read of Bill 33.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 33 be now read a third time.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to speak to this just for a second.

During Committee on this bill last week, the Opposition House Leader asked a question. I think the question was: Do you have any data regarding the number of infractions? Have they gone up on handheld devices? Have we seen an increase or a decrease? At that time I undertook to get the information and provide it.

What I can say is what I've heard from the RNC is that in 2013 there were 715 infractions. In 2014 there were 556. Unfortunately, from January 1 to December 31, 2015, there were 1,352 summary offence tickets issued to operators of vehicles. Obviously, it's our hope that this number will decrease during the calendar year of 2016. I think that those individuals who do so will see increased penalties as a deterrent. That's the goal we set out, and that's what we wanted to see and achieve.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Is it the pleasure of the House that Bill 33 be now read a third time?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Highway Traffic Act No. 2.

MR. SPEAKER: This bill has now been read a third time and it is ordered that the bill do pass and its title be as on the Order Paper.

On motion, a bill, "An Act To Amend The Highway Traffic Act No. 2," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 33)

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Education, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, The Schools Act 1997, Bill 38, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded by the hon. the Government House Leader that he shall have leave to introduce Bill 38, An Act To Amend The Schools Act, 1997 and that the said bill be now read a first time.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the minister shall have leave to introduce Bill 38 and that the said bill be read a first time?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development to introduce a bill, "An Act To Amend The Schools Act, 1997," carried. (Bill 38)

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Schools Act, 1997. (Bill 38)

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

When shall the bill be read a second time?

MR. A. PARSONS: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 38 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Natural Resources, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act to Amend The Income Tax Act 2000 No. 5, Bill 17, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded by the hon. the Government House Leader that he shall leave to introduce Bill 17, An Act To Amend The Income Tax Act 2000 No. 5.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the minister shall have leave to introduce Bill 17 and that the said bill be now read a first time?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board to introduce a bill, "An Act To Amend The Income Tax Act 2000 No. 5", carried. (Bill 17)

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Income Tax Act 2000 No. 5. (Bill 17)

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

When shall the said bill be read a second time?

MR. A. PARSONS: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 17 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Income And Employment Support Act And The Student Financial Assistance Act, Bill 37, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded by the hon. the Government House Leader that he shall have leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Income And Employment Support Act And The Student Financial Assistance Act, Bill 37.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the minister shall have leave to introduce the said bill and that it now be read a first time.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills to introduce a bill, "An Act To Amend The Income And Employment Support Act And The Student Financial Assistance Act", carried. (Bill 37)

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Income And Employment Support Act And The Student Financial Assistance Act. (Bill 37)

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

When shall the said bill be read a second time?

MR. A. PARSONS: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, Bill 37 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 7. I would move pursuant to

Standing Order 11 that the House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. today, Monday, June 6.

Further, Mr. Speaker, I would move Motion 8, pursuant to Standing Order 11 that the House not adjourn at 10 p.m. today, Monday, June 6.

MR. SPEAKER: It has been moved that the House do not adjourn at 5:30 today.

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Those against?

Carried.

It is further moved that the House do not adjourn at 10 o'clock this evening.

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Those against?

Carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

I would call Order 6, second reading of Bill 35.

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

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Health and Community Services, that Bill 35, An Act To Amend The Smoke-Free Environment Act, 2005 And The Tobacco Control Act, be read a second time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 35 be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act To Amend The Smoke-Free Environment Act, 2005 And The Tobacco Control Act." (Bill 35)

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

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am pleased to stand in the House today to open the debate on these important legislative amendments. The proposed amendments to the *Smoke-Free Environment Act, 2005 and the Tobacco Control Act* will further protect the public, in particular, children and youth, from the harms of flavoured tobacco products including menthol and hookah smoking and the potential harms of electronic cigarettes and e-cigarettes.

Our government has committed to preventing and reducing smoking and to promote healthy living throughout our province. I believe that legislation and regulation that helps to reduce the prevalence of and prevent smoking throughout our population is certainly a step toward a healthier Newfoundland and Labrador. Successive governments have taken a comprehensive approach to reduce smoking over the years. As a society evolves and attitudes have changed, our legislation and regulations around smoking have changed, Mr. Speaker.

Since the introduction of the *Smoke-Free Environment Act and the Tobacco Control Act* in 1994 that prohibits smoking in indoor public places and workplaces and prohibits the sale of tobacco to persons under the age of 19, several other key actions have been undertaken. Smoking has been banned in bars, including patios, decks and bingo halls. Restrictions have been placed on how tobacco products can be displayed, stored and promoted at retail. Smoking has been banned in motor vehicles while persons under the age of 16 are present. Designated smoking rooms have been removed from workplaces.

Those efforts have seen very positive results, Mr. Speaker. Overall, smoking rates have decreased in Newfoundland and Labrador from over 28 per cent in 1999 to just under 20 per cent in 2013. The news is better for those aged 15 to 19. Smoking is down from 30 per cent to 12.4 per cent, Mr. Speaker. For young adults aged 20 to 24, it is down from 37 per cent to 28 per cent.

While much has been done in the last 20 years to restrict smoking in public places and to

discourage young people from taking up smoking, we can't let down our guard. We are concerned about the potential harm to public health, particularly relating to children and youth resulting from e-cigarettes, the availability of flavoured tobacco products and the impact of smoking other products like hookah.

The amendments we are debating today mark the next step in the evolution of Newfoundland and Labrador's efforts to prevent and reduce smoking. Preventing and reducing smoking remains a priority. Government is of the view that the advent of flavoured tobacco products, e-cigarettes and the use of hookah could lead to more young people taking up smoking.

According to the World Health Organization, all tobacco products are harmful and are a leading cause of disease and death worldwide. Our Health Canada reports that each year smoking kills an estimated 37,000 Canadians, making smoking the country's leading cause of preventable disease and death. Unfortunately, Newfoundland and Labrador continues to have among the highest smoking rates in Canada, at approximately 20 per cent for those aged 15 years and older. We know that despite past and ongoing efforts to curb smoking, children and youth are still experimenting with tobacco and starting to smoke.

I would like to take a few moments to walk through the changes we are proposing in this bill. Amendments to the *Smoke-Free Environment Act, 2005 and the Tobacco Control Act* will strengthen measures to protect people from the harms of flavoured tobacco products and hookah smoking, and the potential harms of e-cigarettes. These amendments will prohibit the sale of flavoured tobacco products including menthol. The ban will apply to cigarettes, cigarillos, fine-cut tobacco and smokeless tobacco that have a characterizing flavour such as candy, bubble gum, fruit, menthol or represented as being flavoured.

With respect to e-cigarettes, proposed amendments will prohibit the sale of electronic cigarettes to persons under the age of 19. It will prohibit the sale where the sale of tobacco products is currently prohibited. It will prohibit use in indoor public places, workplaces and in motor vehicles when occupied by a person under

the age of 16 and regulate the promotion, including advertising and display of e-cigarettes, in the same manner that the province currently regulates tobacco promotion and display.

Our amendments related to e-cigarette aim to strike a balance between minimizing potential health risks from these products, while acknowledging the same individuals seek to use these products to quit smoking.

With respect to hookah, proposed amendments will prohibit the sale of non-tobacco shisha products to persons under the age of 19; prohibit the sale where the sale of tobacco products are currently prohibited; regulate the promotion, including advertising and display, in the same manner that the province currently regulates tobacco promotion and display; and prohibit hookah smoking of non-tobacco shisha products in indoor public places and workplaces, including any existing hookah establishment.

Coming into force dates, the following changes will come into force upon the amendments receiving Royal Assent: prohibition on the sale of e-cigarettes and non-tobacco shisha to persons under the age of 19; prohibition on persons under the age of 19 from entering or working in a hookah establishment; and prohibition on the use of e-cigarettes in indoor public places, workplaces and in motor vehicles when occupied by a person under the age of 16. All other changes will come into force on July 1, 2017.

We have delayed the implementation date for several of the amendments in recognition that businesses will need time to adjust to the new legislation. The changes we are making to our legislation are closely aligned with several other jurisdictions in Canada, including the other Atlantic provinces. We will be joining with Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Alberta, Quebec and Ontario in banning flavoured tobacco.

Our amendments respecting e-cigarettes will make our legislation similar to that of seven other provinces, including the Atlantic provinces, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba and British Columbia. In 2015, the other Atlantic provinces banned the use of the hookah water pipe in indoor public places as have several

Canadian municipalities, including the cities of Toronto and Vancouver.

We realize that e-cigarettes are often promoted as a device to help people quit smoking, but we also realize they also hold the potential to have the very negative consequence of introducing the smoking culture to young people who wrongly assume there are not negative health effects.

The truth is we don't really know what is in the vapour that people are inhaling. There is no regulation and no substantive research as to the long-term health effects. Having said that, we recognize that adults may wish to use the product to help them quit smoking traditional cigarettes, and so we are balancing the rights of those individuals against the need to minimize their accessibility to children and youth.

Vaping e-cigarettes look an awful lot like smoking and could serve to normalize smoking again. That's something we've worked very hard to stop over the years. Regulating e-cigarettes, as we do cigarettes, and regulating their sale and promotion is the latest step in this effort.

In Newfoundland and Labrador and other provinces, most licensed tobacco retailers, such as gas stations and convenience stores, sell e-cigarettes. There are also several speciality stores, vape shops, where e-cigarettes and nicotine e-juices are sold.

Under the proposed amendments these specialty stores will be treated similar to tobacco shops, provided the only business conducted is the sale of e-cigarettes and associated products. By regulating and not banning e-cigarettes, this approach balances the need for adults who want to access e-cigarettes to help them quit smoking, or as an alternative to smoking tobacco with the need to minimize concern over their easy accessibility to children and youth, their potential to re-normalize smoking and undermine smoke-free policies in indoor public places, workplaces and motor vehicles.

Adding flavours to tobacco products makes them less harsh and more attractive to young people. They're often packaged in brightly coloured scented packaging, again appealing to young people and increasing the possibility that

they will experiment with this product. For these reasons, we are concerned about them serving as the gateway to tobacco addiction for youth.

Tobacco smoking during youth increases the likelihood youth will become regular smokers at some point in their lifetime. Research shows that menthol cigarette smoking is how many young people are introduced to smoking. Research also shows that menthol cigarette smokers find it very hard to quit smoking.

Hookah smoking uses water pipes to smoke specially made tobacco and non-tobacco products called shisha. Shisha is a sticky, sweet mixture of tobacco and/or other plant material, molasses and other flavours. The mixing of tobacco and non-tobacco products with flavours like fruit, chocolate, cherry and bubble gum have made hookah smoking more palatable and popular.

Shisha is heated with charcoal in the head of the hookah. The smoke passes through the base to the water bowl and is smoked through an attached hose or hoses. Hookah tobacco shisha smoke contains many of the same harmful toxins as cigarette smoke and has been associated with lung cancer, respiratory illness, low birth weight and gum disease. Smoking non-tobacco shisha products is not a safe alternative to smoking shisha products that contain tobacco.

Madam Speaker, the availability of non-tobacco shisha to youth is a cause for concern as smoking non-tobacco shisha increases the risk for smoking related cancers, heart disease and lung disease, as well as infectious diseases such as meningitis, hepatitis and influenza, if smoking is shared. Second-hand tobacco smoke from hookah pipes is also a risk for non-smokers, including employees of hookah establishments. The permitting of smoking any product in indoor public places sends an inconsistent message regarding smoking inside business establishments. Therefore, it is time to address the issue, as many other jurisdictions have, and ban the smoking of all shisha products from all indoor public places.

Madam Speaker, I know that other Members of this hon. House will be speaking to this legislation today as we move through the second reading and Committee stages. I encourage all

Members to support these amendments which are designed to prevent and reduce smoking, particularly among young children and youth throughout our province.

I will have more to say when the time comes to close debate on the second reading.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER (Dempster): The Speaker recognizes the hon. Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune.

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

I'm pleased to have an opportunity to lead the debate on behalf of the Official Opposition on Bill 35, An Act to Amend the Smoke-Free Environment Act, 2005 and the Tobacco Control Act.

As the minister has outlined both here and in the news conference earlier today, Bill 35 is a sizeable piece of legislation that attempts to address several issues at once. And it is unfortunate that we are not dealing with those issues individually because they are not the same, Madam Speaker. As I get into my speech, I will elaborate on why I'm making this commentary.

The vaping issue should certainly stand alone because it raises unique issues that we need to be addressing, not just provincially but as a country and a nation as a whole. Madam Speaker, Opposition Members received a briefing on this bill which, as I stated, is quite comprehensive, just Friday, and here we are today in second reading and perhaps Committee of the Whole. So we do feel like it is being rushed through fairly quickly. And over the course of this weekend, in addition to the briefing we had on Friday, we received a lot of emails, both from people who are in support of the bill and people who had some questions and concerns about the bill, Madam Speaker, and it is our view that all voices and all concerns need to be considered. We have heard, as I've said, that the bill has its supporters but we also know that there are others who believe strongly that this particular bill, as it

is presently written, doesn't really strike the right balance that some people feel it should have.

Then there are the vast majority of the 530,000 Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that we all represent here in the House of Assembly. The vast majority of the people who we represent and who will be impacted by this bill do not yet know the details or implications of this legislation because they have not had the opportunity to hear about it or to talk about it or to have input into this legislation.

So like so much legislation in this sitting, it was rushed into the House, out of the blue, by a government that is saying to us trust us; we know what we're doing. We all have apprehensions about that, particularly in light of things these last few weeks. That's, of course, absolutely not the way that the Legislature is supposed to work.

The government departments may have been consulted but we, as legislators, must also be provided with the opportunity to do our own due diligence and consultations. Rushing through legislation without proper scrutiny and public consultation is not always the responsible way to make laws in the province – not on any matter, but especially on a public health matter.

The government gave the Opposition parties a briefing on the bill this Friday. It gave a press conference on the bill this Monday morning, and it expects the Opposition parties to vote in support of the legislation on Monday afternoon. Does that sound like due diligence? It certainly doesn't sound like due diligence to me, Madam Speaker.

If it were a simple housekeeping legislative measure, then maybe this approach might be appropriate. For some bills, that is the case, but this is absolutely not such a bill. This is a bill that may have health implications if we go too far in one direction, and it may have other health implications if we go too far in the other direction.

This is one of those bills that demand that we strike a very fine balance. There is another reason that we need to be sure we get this right the first time because similar legislation in other

provinces, which they have modeled this legislation after, is now being challenged in the courts. The question that none of us know the answer to is: Will those pieces of legislation actually stand up in court?

What would the implications for us be if certain provisions in this legislation are struck down? What are the legal opinions on what the province is doing? I think certainly for all of us, as legislators here in the House, we feel like we should and need to see these legal opinions.

Here is another concern that needs to be addressed: Where is Health Canada on all of this? I've spent the weekend reading through the report done by the Standing Committee on Health, which has taken some time to review this matter, and it's quite a comprehensive document that has many questions as well, Madam Speaker.

Here, we have a matter that crosses jurisdictional lines. Health Canada definitely has the role and probably should be taking the lead role. Last year, the House of Commons received the report of the Standing Committee on Health regarding vaping. It recommended collaborative action by Ottawa and the provinces.

What has become of that? I asked the question today, Madam Speaker, during Question Period, but we never got an answer. We really would like to know, what is the status of the report? What has been done with the actions and recommendations coming out of that? Why are the provinces acting individually and bringing in a patchwork of laws and regulations when it makes much more sense for us to be working together? Those are just some of the many questions, and these questions are merely about the process itself.

Under second reading today, we will be proposing an amendment to send this legislation to a legislation review committee for proper public consultation and analysis. Because we have an obligation as legislators to do our own due diligence, and a process of public hearings is the means by which legislators all across this country, and federally, and in other countries, normally arrive at decisions on important and contentious matters like this one.

The Liberals promised legislation review committees in their 2015 red book. In fact, here's what the red book actually said, "A New Liberal Government will make better use of existing committees and seek opportunities for further nonpartisan cooperation." Another quote, "Legislative review committees are well-established in Canada at both the provincial and federal level. These committees review proposed legislation, offer amendments, and call expert witnesses to provide information. They are an effective way to strengthen the role of elected members and reduce unnecessary partisanship in legislative debates."

So far, we have not seen this government keep that promise, and hopefully this is going to be the place they make good to start on that commitment, and it would be nice to see a commitment actually brought to fruition.

This is certainly a bill that warrants broad consultation and review. Even if it doesn't result in any changes to the legislation as it's currently written, such a process will open up a wider public debate about vaping and smoking, and that is something that is badly needed in the province.

I think that one thing we all agree on, on both sides of the House, is working toward a smoke-free environment is the ideal type of situation we would all like to have for our loved ones.

It will raise public awareness of the new restrictions that government intends to impose. That, we feel, is very important as well, Madam Speaker. The public should be aware of what are in these bills before they are passed here in this hon. House.

It will educate parents and youth, smokers and others about vaping. It will help us, as legislators, to strike the right balance. That is particularly important when it comes to vaping.

Here is why the vaping issue is particularly important and here's the crux of the issue in the simplest of terms. On one side of the debate are those who are saying that vaping leads to smoking. On the other side of the debate are those who are saying that vaping helps people to quit smoking, but the issue is far more

complicated than that. It is something we need to be talking about.

Should vaping be more or less accessible? Where is the greater harm? I believe the vaping aspect of this bill is the most significant and controversial, but as I said, it's not the only provision.

Before I address the vaping aspect in greater detail, let me mention the other provisions of the bill which also raise some questions. I'll start, Madam Speaker, with menthol cigarettes. This bill will allow the sale of certain flavoured cigars, but prevent the sale of menthol cigarettes. The rationale is that menthol is a flavour that appeals to youth, but the cigars tend to appeal more to adults. Is that the right judgment call? I think we should ask the public about that, or at least let them know that as of July next year they will not be able to buy menthol cigarettes in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Menthol cigarettes have been around for decades and, no doubt, there are smokers who use them regularly. Come next year, people may be able to buy marijuana cigarettes – and, of course, that's yet to be seen – but they won't be able to buy menthol cigarettes. Some people may question why that is the case. We know that banning things doesn't make them unavailable. We certainly know that, Madam Speaker. It just opens the door to an underworld.

Will the measures to ban flavoured tobacco products fuel a black markets in products that won't be sold or taxed in retail stores? Is that something we should be concerned about? Do law enforcement officials have a view on this? That's something we don't know as legislators, Madam Speaker, and something we would like to have some consultation on. Will this approach have its intended effect, or will it actually result in quite another unintended opposite effect?

The second issue that I'd like to draw some attention to is the hookah lounge. Another aspect of this bill is the ban it will impose on hookah lounges in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. There is only one such lounge in the province at present and it's in downtown St. John's. It was set up legally. This bill will essentially drive it out of business, at least as a hookah lounge.

We realize that the cities of Toronto and Vancouver, along with some provinces, are also banning hookah lounges. Hookah use is prevalent in the Middle East and North Africa. The patrons of the local hookah lounge are not exclusively from these regions, but for some people from these cultural communities, that lounge may be a cultural haven, and removing it may be viewed as culturally insensitive. We certainly would like to do some consultations with these people to find that our firsthand, Madam Speaker.

In Toronto, some lounge owners have raised objections about insensitivity. Public hearings would give the operator and the patrons the opportunity to make their case publicly. If in the end the decision to close the lounge is the same, at least they will have had the opportunity to make a public case and be heard by the legislators who will ultimately be making the decision. It is not just what we do, but how we do it, that is important. So by all means, let's give them the opportunity to be heard by sending this bill to a legislation review committee for public hearings.

Another issue, Madam Speaker, is marijuana legislation. It is impossible to talk about smoking legislation without considering what may happen next year when Ottawa is expected to bring forward its own legislation with respect to marijuana. This bill does not even deal with that, nor should it be expected to, but people are talking about it and we need to be listening. It's one more issue, similar to the issues in this bill, that we really need to open up a public dialogue about.

I do not envy parents whose children are struggling with all these issues. It must be very, very confusing for young people. We certainly empathize with them. Opening up a dialogue will help us identify the issues on which people need clarity.

Now, we're back to the issue of vaping, where clarity in this bill is desperately lacking. Governments in this country are all over the place – taking steps forward, backtracking, undecided on what to do.

A House of Commons Report of the Standing Committee on Health was issued in March of

2015. It was entitled, *Vaping: Towards A Regulatory Framework For E-Cigarettes*. It's an excellent report that everyone involved in this discussion should read from front to back. It calls for concerted federal-provincial action, with Ottawa taking the lead. That's certainly not the approach we see here in the form of Bill 35.

Let's consider where that report came from. On September 29, 2014, a letter from the Minister of Health to the Chair of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health stated: "Due to a lack of evidence on the benefits or harms of e-cigarettes, it would be helpful for the Standing Committee on Health to study their potential risks and benefits, seek advice from a variety of health stakeholders, and provide a report."

So the Committee – on October 7, 2014 – adopted the following motion to set out its terms of reference for such a study: "That, immediately following the Committee's consideration of the draft report on marijuana's health risk and harms, the Committee undertake a study of no fewer than five (5) meetings on e-cigarettes beginning with a briefing from government officials and that this study focus on the following areas:

"(a) The potential risk, benefits and challenges associated with these products domestically, including the renormalization of smoking, and use as smoking cessation aids;

"(b) The pros and cons of ways in which different jurisdictions both domestically and internationally have chosen to regulate these products; and

"(c) Options for realizing any benefits and addressing any significant health and safety risks.

"While recognizing that business referred to the Committee by the House such as Government legislation or Estimates will take precedence in scheduling over this study. And that the Committee report its finding to the House."

So the Committee went about and did its business. "The Committee held eight meetings with 33 witnesses, including federal government officials, health officials from other levels of government, manufacturers of electronic

cigarettes and related devices, users of the devices, stakeholder organizations, and medical experts.

“The Committee heard from several witnesses that electronic devices intended to replace combustible cigarettes are not new, having first been introduced in 2007. However, as also described by witnesses, the technology surrounding these devices has changed over time, and continues to evolve rapidly.

“Health Canada officials told the Committee that although these devices are not regulated, those that contain nicotine have not received the necessary approvals from Health Canada. A warning from Health Canada to consumers to avoid the use of such devices was issued in 2009.

“The Department reported that 741 shipments containing electronic cigarettes were ‘recommended for refusal’ at the Canada-United States border between 1 April and 30 June 2014, while many retail outlets received ‘cease and desist’ letters related to the sale of such devices from the Department.

“In recent months, however, there has been increased attention given to electronic cigarettes, with a number of provincial and municipal jurisdictions having considered regulation, some legislation having been introduced and/or enacted, and data suggesting that use of these devices is increasing, including by young Canadians.

“In addition, the World Health Organization (WHO), of which Canada is a member, reported on an October 2014 Conference of the Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, inviting members dealing with electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) ‘to consider taking measures ... in order to achieve at least the following objectives, in accordance with national law:’

“(a) prevent the initiation of ENDS/ENNDS by non-smokers and youth with special attention to the vulnerable groups;

“(b) minimize as far as possible potential health risks to ENDS/ENNDS users and protect non-users from exposure to their emissions;

“(c) prevent unproven health claims from being made about ENDS/ENNDS; and

“(d) protect tobacco-control activities from all commercial and other vested interests related to ENDS/ENNDS, including interests of the tobacco industry.

“The WHO also issued an invitation to the signatories of the framework convention ‘to consider prohibiting or regulating ENDS/ENNDS, including as tobacco products, medicinal products, consumer products, or other categories, as appropriate, taking into account a high level of protection for human health.’ In their appearance before the Committee, Health Canada officials suggested that current research results are not sufficient as a basis for determining appropriate regulatory responses.

“Witnesses before the Committee addressed the issues identified in the original motion, covering the effectiveness of the status quo in Canada and in other countries with respect to regulating electronic cigarettes, the extent to which these devices are known to put users and others at risk in health terms, the extent to which they are effective in reducing harm to users and others, whether and to what extent they may serve as a ‘gateway’ for users to combustible tobacco, concerns with access to the devices by youth and other non-smokers, and whether they may be effective in reducing or eliminating the use of combustible tobacco now and in the future. Additional issues raised frequently by witnesses were the need for more extensive research to provide sufficient evidence on the impact of electronic cigarettes, and how electronic cigarette use could impact tobacco control, particularly on whether it would ‘renormalize’ smoking.”

So here are some of the things that the Commons committee reported. “While there was widespread agreement among witnesses that insufficient evidence exists to reach a clear conclusion with respect to health risks or benefits associated with the use of electronic cigarettes, there were different interpretations of the limited evidence available.

“Differences of opinion about health risks or benefits included risks imposed on users and upon bystanders.”

“Witnesses also discussed risks to individuals who are in close proximity to users of electronic cigarettes. Opinions varied in terms of what those risks might be and the appropriate response to them. While there have been significant restrictions on the use of tobacco where bystanders might be exposed to ‘second-hand’ smoke, no such restrictions exist with respect to electronic cigarettes. As Dr. Milan Khara pointed out, protecting bystanders from the effects of second-hand vapour was one of the recommendations made by the WHO.

“The Committee heard that there is not sufficient evidence about what impact, if any, electronic cigarette use might have on bystanders. Some witnesses cited research demonstrating only a minimal impact, while others raised concern about possible or probably negative impacts.”

“Virtually all witnesses identified the apparent reduced harm to the users of electronic cigarettes containing nicotine compared to the users of combustible tobacco cigarettes. As discussed in the previous section on health risks, however, there were concerns about whether the reduction in harm for smokers justified the risks of introducing a new product with nicotine. For example, the Committee heard from one witness:

“Although (electronic cigarettes are) less risky than tobacco, this is by no means a harmless product. Although we believe it should be made accessible to all smokers who look to reduce the harm they might suffer from their addiction, it should definitely not be a way to banalize nicotine addiction or nicotine use.

“Other testimony suggested the substantial costs to the health care system related to the results of smoking are sufficient reason to consider the substitution of electronic cigarettes for conventional cigarettes, regardless of the impacts on reductions in nicotine consumption or ultimate cessation of use of either device:

“Tobacco use remains the leading preventable cause of disease and premature death in Canada ... and approximately 85% of lung cancer deaths. International models have shown that by getting tobacco users to quit, cancer mortality can be significantly reduced.... Emerging evidence suggests that nicotine-containing e-

cigarettes may be a less harmful nicotine product containing fewer carcinogens than combustible cigarettes and other tobacco products. As such, nicotine-containing e-cigarettes may be a product that could help smokers reduce their health risks, and may help them to quit.”

“Witness before the Committee suggested that electronic cigarettes are effective smoking cessation devices. In addition, the Committee received letters from users of these products indicating that their use has resulted in a reduction or elimination of smoking tobacco cigarettes. Still other witnesses and other stakeholders identified the potential of electronic cigarettes to support smoking cessation.”

“The testimony before the Committee on the ‘gateway effect’ focussed largely on the extent to which electronic cigarettes are being used by individuals who have never smoked, including youth, and by youth more generally.”

“Data on youth experimentation with electronic cigarettes were provided by witnesses. For example, Health Canada officials said that an Ontario study showed in 2013 ‘nearly 15% of students in grades 9 to 12 were reported to have tried e-cigarettes.

“Witnesses identified advertising of electronic cigarettes targeted to youth as a significant concern, often citing candy flavoured electronic cigarettes as being particularly appealing to youth. Other witnesses have told the Committee that such flavours are not intended to target youth, and that the availability of a variety of flavours is important in encouraging smokers to switch to electronic cigarettes. For example, one witness expressed the opinion that flavourings are not being used to target youth, noting that ‘we have evidence that demonstrates that the flavour of descriptors of our products do not appeal to non-smoking teens, but do appeal to smoking adults.’ Finally, one witness expressed the importance of flavours: ‘banning e-liquid flavours represents an effective ban on e-cigarettes, as all e-liquid is flavoured, including tobacco flavours.’ ”

“The Committee heard much testimony on the role that an electronic-cigarette use could have on undermining the gains made by tobacco control efforts, both in Canada and

internationally. This phenomenon is referred to as the ‘renormalizing effect’”

“The extent of youth experimentation with electronic cigarettes varied across provinces and countries; however, almost all witnesses agreed that all such experimentation should be discouraged and that sales of electronic cigarettes, with or without nicotine, be prohibited to people under the age of 18.

“Daniel David (Chair of the Board, Electronic Cigarette Trade Association) told the Committee that most electronic cigarette shops require proof-of-age identification for people who appear to be under the age of 25, and Boris Giller (Co-founder, 180 Smoke) explained to the Committee that for Internet purchases, Canada Post and other couriers can verify age at delivery.

“A dissenting opinion on this age restriction was offered by Dr. John Britton who added the following caveat: ‘[w]hilst I entirely agree that limiting access to young people is probably a good thing, particularly if we have young people who are otherwise going to smoke, it would make far more sense to have them use an electronic cigarette.’ ”

“At the same time, witnesses told the Committee that harm reduction for current smokers could be hindered by overly restrictive access to electronic cigarette and that making electronic cigarettes less accessible than tobacco products would deter smokers from choosing this less dangerous alternative. As described by one witness, steps to make these devices less accessible than tobacco products would ‘provide a competitive advantage for tobacco cigarettes.’ Another witness said I think that if you’re really looking at it from a public health standpoint and you want consumers of traditional tobacco products to have access to electronic cigarettes, they need to have as much access as they have to tobacco. My feeling is that if a smoker can walk a block to get their pack of cigarettes, they should be able to have access to electronic cigarettes within that same distance.”

Another witness has made more comments, Madam Speaker. Among witnesses and stakeholders who supported access to electronic cigarettes for current smokers, there were

bringing forward varying approaches and identifying varying approaches.

So you can see from just the witnesses I have mentioned so far to the World Health Organization, there is certainly a lot of variety in people’s opinions on this whole issue. In fact, many witnesses propose that devices with nicotine should be available without a prescription. So you have many varying opinions and points of view.

“Others suggested that to be effective in reducing harm or supporting smoking cessation, the sale of electronic cigarettes should be accompanied by expert advice and training in the use of the devices and other related products, including nicotine-containing liquid.”

“The Committee heard from Health Canada officials, public health officials, and other witnesses that there is a paucity of scientific evidence on many aspects of electronic cigarettes, including the following issues identified in this report: health impacts on users and bystanders; the gateway effect (particularly for youth); the renormalization effect; and smoking cessation. The Committee heard that requirements imposed by Health Canada for the authorization of electronic cigarettes with nicotine for sale in Canada, and similar requirements in the UK, are too onerous on producers, and that further research on the health effects of electronic cigarettes, possibly independent of the manufacturers or distributors of electronic cigarettes and related products, is needed. Therefore, the Committee recommends:

“RECOMMENDATION 1: That the Government of Canada financially support research through existing channels, and that these funds be allocated to independent research on the health effects of electronic cigarettes and related devices, and their impact on the uptake of nicotine products by youth and on other tobacco control efforts.”

“All of the witnesses who raised the issue of regulating electronic cigarettes agreed that some type of product and industry regulation is needed.” So, Madam Speaker, even though there are differing points of view as to how we move forward, everyone does agree that some type of regulations are needed. What exactly these

regulations should look like, I think the argument is strong that we still need more time and more research to be undertaken.

A variety of approaches have been taken around the world “with respect to regulating electronic cigarettes including regulating them as tobacco products, regulating them as therapeutic products, and regulating them as consumer products. Some witnesses stated that provisions relating to federal tobacco regulation should apply to electronic cigarettes, while one witness suggested that regulating them as therapeutic products would be appropriate.” So, again, you can see the many differing points of view.

“The majority of witnesses who spoke on the subject of regulation, however, felt that regulating them as tobacco products or as therapeutic products would be problematic for a number of reasons because electronic cigarettes are unique products that fit neither the tobacco nor the therapeutic regulatory model. A regulatory model designed specifically for electronic cigarettes would therefore be appropriate.”

“The majority of witnesses who spoke about how electronic cigarettes should be regulated expressed the opinion that none of the existing frameworks (tobacco products, therapeutic products, or consumer products) would be suitable for regulating electronic cigarettes, and two of the witnesses who proposed regulating them as tobacco products suggested that that approach only be an interim solution until a new regulatory framework is established.”

“Many witnesses expressed the opinion that the regulatory approach needed to be proportionate to risk; as one witness pointed out, electronic cigarettes have a ‘hugely different risk profile’ than combustible tobacco. One witness expressed the opinion that forcing electronic cigarettes into the tobacco regulatory framework would make electronic cigarettes less accessible and appealing, and another noted that ‘we want the less hazardous products to be the more available products.’” So, again, you can see how those who believe that electronic cigarettes will minimize the number of people who actually start smoking cigarettes, from their point of view, the more access you have to the e-

cigarettes the better to prevent them turning to the real cigarettes.

As you can see from their consultations that they’ve had, there’s still much work left to be doing and still a great deal of varying opinions out there and so much that we really don’t know. “David M. Graham expressed the opinion that requiring a prescription for electronic cigarettes makes little sense: [T]he comparison between electronic cigarettes and combustion cigarettes is unavoidable. If combustion cigarettes are limited to access only by prescription, then perhaps it may be appropriate to think about similar restrictions on e-cigarettes. But it’s perverse in the extreme to believe that a product that is so harmful, that kills half of its long-term users, is widely available and that a product that is a magnitude of difference in risk would be more highly restricted. It’s an upside-down logic”

Here’s what the House of Commons Committee recommended. They have a number of regulations, Madam Speaker, and I’m going to read into the record what the House of Commons Management Committee has stated.

“RECOMMENDATION 2: That the Government of Canada work with all affected stakeholders to establish a new legislative framework (under the Tobacco Act, new legislation, or other relevant statutes) for regulating electronic cigarettes and related devices.

“RECOMMENDATION 3: That the Government of Canada consult with the public, provinces/territories and stakeholders with respect to the regulation of electronic cigarettes with a view to protecting the health of Canadians.” And at the end of the day, that’s what we all want to do is protect the health of Canadians and do what is in the best interest of all the people we represent, Madam Speaker.

“Many witnesses also spoke of the need to establish product quality and safety standards. The use of electronic cigarette flavourings was also a frequently-raised subject, but there was no consensus as to whether these flavourings should be restricted as they are in tobacco products.”

Here's what the House of Commons Committee recommended. "RECOMMENDATION 4: That the Government of Canada work with all affected stakeholders to establish a new legislative framework (under the Tobacco Act, new legislation, or other relevant statutes) for regulating electronic cigarettes and related devices and that this new framework address both electronic cigarettes that contain nicotine and other substances and electronic cigarettes that do not contain nicotine."

They also considered the appearance of e-cigarettes and recommended this.

"RECOMMENDATION 5: That the Government of Canada work with all affected stakeholders to establish a new legislative framework (under the Tobacco Act, new legislation, or other relevant statutes) for regulating electronic cigarettes and related devices and that this new framework require that electronic cigarettes be visually distinct from other tobacco products."

They considered the importance of ensuring the level of nicotine in the products is regulated, so they made these following recommendations.

"RECOMMENDATION 6: That the Government of Canada work with all affected stakeholders to establish a new legislative framework (under the Tobacco Act, new legislation, or other relevant statutes) for regulating electronic cigarettes and related devices and that this new framework establish maximum levels of nicotine contained in electronic cigarette liquid or vapour."

"Many witnesses spoke of the need to establish reporting mechanisms to gather data about the safety of electronic cigarettes, the need to require manufacturers to disclose ingredients in the electronic cigarettes, and the need to establish certain manufacturing and safety standards for electronic cigarettes.

"With respect to the importance of gathering data, Dr. Peter Selby suggested that 'we need to have a detailed surveillance and monitoring system that can tell us what people are using and what harms they're coming to.' Another witness noted that smoking uptake should be monitored, and then regulations should be modified if there is an increase in uptake.

"Other witnesses mentioned that manufacturers should be required to publicly disclose ingredients in electronic cigarettes, or to disclose the contents and emissions of the products to the government."

The Commons Committee in Recommendation 7 stated: "That the Government of Canada work with all affected stakeholders to establish a new legislative framework ... for regulating electronic cigarettes and related devices and that this new framework establish standards relating to the safety of all components of electronic cigarettes, and also require manufacturers and importers of electronic cigarettes to disclose information relating to ingredients."

They also had recommendations on packaging and labeling. Recommendation 8 states: "That the Government of Canada work with all affected stakeholders to establish a new legislative framework ... for regulating electronic cigarettes and related devices and that this new framework require that electronic cigarette components be sold in child-resistant packaging, and that all packaging clearly and accurately indicate the concentration of nicotine and contain appropriate safety warnings about the product."

"With respect to claims that electronic cigarettes could assist smokers in quitting, a few witnesses stated that manufacturers should be prohibited from making unproven health claims about their products. As one witness mentioned, '[e]-cigarette manufacturers should be required to comply with the same stringent criteria as other manufacturers of smoking cessation aids before being allowed to make such claims.'"

The Committee therefore recommended this for Recommendation 9: "That the Government of Canada work with all affected stakeholders to establish a new legislative framework ... for regulating electronic cigarettes and related devices and that this new framework prohibit electronic cigarette manufacturers from making unproven health claims."

There was also, Madam Speaker, "broad agreement that the sale of electronic cigarettes to minors should be prohibited. Rob Cunningham stressed the importance of enforcing any prohibition against selling electronic cigarettes

to minors that might be established in legislation: [B]anning e-cigarette sales to minors by itself is insufficient to protect youth. We know from long-standing experience with tobacco legislation that sales to minors laws are notoriously difficult to enforce. The most recent Health Canada evaluation found that fully one in six stores sold tobacco illegally to youth. Kids find and know the stores that are willing to sell illegally.”

The committee recommended this as Recommendation 10, “That the Government of Canada work with all affected stakeholders to establish a new legislative framework ... for regulating electronic cigarettes and related devices and that this new framework prohibit the sale of electronic cigarettes or other electronic nicotine delivery systems to persons under the age of 18.

“... concerns about ‘renormalization’ of smoking were expressed by several witnesses, as were concerns about potential health risks to bystanders. Of the witnesses who raised the issue of where the use of electronic cigarettes should be permitted, the majority told the Committee that their use should be prohibited in indoor public spaces, where smoking is prohibited, and in workplaces and public spaces that are under federal jurisdiction where smoking is already banned. A few witnesses suggested there should be greater latitude with respect to where electronic cigarette use should be permitted. For example, Dr. Ostiguy suggested that exceptions should be made to allow the use of electronic cigarettes in certain public spaces such as in prisons and in palliative care facilities. Dr. Britton also mentioned that allowing electronic cigarettes to be used in mental health facilities ‘would make sense.’

“Boris Giller stated that a number of smokers switch to electronic cigarettes because they can use the products indoors: ‘[i]t’s one of the top reasons why people do it. We ask that you don’t ban indoor vaping as long as there’s no proof of second-hand vaping harm.’ With respect to proof of harm, Mr. Giller stated that ‘[air quality research] shows that e-cigarette second-hand vape is well below the occupational hazard threshold in air quality, so we would ask you to allow indoor vaping at the establishment’s

discretion and not send ex-smokers outside to breathe second-hand smoke.’ ”

So in response to his witness testimony there, here what’s the Common’s committee recommended in Recommendation 11. You will see, Madam Speaker – I’m going to come back to this as well – every recommendations has the same opening sentence: “That the Government of Canada work with all affected stakeholders to establish a new legislative framework”

There is a reason I point out that emphasis because I’m drawing close to wrapping up soon. There is a theme in every single recommendation that calls upon the Government of Canada to establish a new legislative framework and in this recommendation, “... for regulating electronic cigarettes and related devices and that this new framework prohibit the use of electronic cigarettes and other electronic nicotine delivery systems in federally regulated public spaces.”

Then of course there’s the issue of advertising. “Advertising of electronic cigarettes was the issue raised most frequently by witnesses. Every witness who spoke to this issue noted that some type of advertising restriction would be required for the marketing of electronic cigarettes.

“Many witnesses who discussed advertising indicated that electronic cigarettes should be subject to the same advertising and promotion restrictions that are in place for tobacco products, or that advertising should be strictly regulated. As Dr. David McKeown stated:

“Federal regulation is also urgently needed to address [...] e-cigarette promotion and advertising. We’ve been disturbed to see that e-cigarettes are marketed, particularly in the United States, in similar ways that cigarettes were promoted before most tobacco advertising and promotion was prohibited through federal tobacco legislation. This includes strategies such as free product offers, celebrity endorsements, overt lifestyle advertising, and attractive product packaging and flavours. This type of promotion influences the perceived acceptability of e-cigarette use and smoking, and I’m particularly concerned about its impact on youth.”

So that was one of the concerns expressed by Dr. David McKeown.

“Other witnesses recommended a less comprehensive approach to advertising restrictions. Daniel David indicated that he ‘would support some very specific marketing restrictions,’ particularly with respect to marketing to individuals who have never smoked or to youth, but also stated that ‘it is important to have some aspect of marketing to let current smokers know that [an alternate] product is available.’

“David M. Graham echoed that opinion: We believe that advertising is critically important to raise awareness of this new class of products, but unfettered advertising with no restrictions, no rules, and no limitations is entirely irresponsible. Therefore, we support restrictions on advertising that allow it to take place with appropriate rules that are enforced by an appropriate body.

“Boris Giller was concerned about the potential impact advertising could have on the electronic cigarette industry: ‘[it] would kill competition. It would reduce the appeal, compared to cigarettes. It would harm innovation and limit the recruitment of smokers....’

“Given that protecting youth from becoming addicted to nicotine is of great concern to the Committee, and given the concerns that have been expressed by witnesses that non-smokers who start using electronic cigarettes may start using tobacco products (the “gateway effect”), the Committee recommends:

“RECOMMENDATION 12: That the Government of Canada work with all affected stakeholders to establish a new legislative framework (under the *Tobacco Act*, new legislation, or other relevant statutes) for regulating electronic cigarettes and related devices and that this new framework restrict advertising and promotional activities for these products.”

The Committee also discussed the role of the tobacco industry with respect to electronic cigarettes, and the issue of cross-branding or co-branding, which involves tobacco industry logos being used on electronic cigarettes. “To address

the concern that cross-branding could contribute to the renormalization of smoking and increased take-up of tobacco products, the Committee recommends:

“Recommendation 13: That the Government of Canada work with all affected stakeholders to establish a new legislative framework ... and that this new framework prohibit cross-branding practices, which can involve tobacco industry logos being used on electronic cigarettes.”

The Committee also made a recommendation about flavours on its electronic cigarettes and it said: “That the Government of Canada work with all affected stakeholders to establish a new legislative framework ... and that this new framework prohibit the use of flavouring in electronic cigarette liquids that are specifically designed to appeal to youth, such as candy flavourings.”

There was a news story on Global News in January about vaping, among many other news stories on the subject of late. David Sweanor, an adjunct professor of law at the University of Ottawa, has spent 30 years as a public health advocate and he sees e-cigarettes as an alternative to cigarettes.

He is quoted as saying: “We’ve ended up with an industry that is largely self-regulated ... But it’s becoming a more controlled market over time. If anything the products have become much better.” He said: there is “no question” that e-cigarettes can be a helpful smoking aide.

He said: “The reality is 37,000 Canadians are going to die this year as a direct result of cigarette smoking, most of them are saying, ‘I wish I didn’t smoke,’ but they are dependent on nicotine The whole idea of alternatives to cigarettes as a way of getting rid of cigarettes has absolutely enormous public health potential.”

David Hammond, a professor in the school of public health at the University of Waterloo, is quoted as saying: “E-cigarettes almost certainly have some health risk, but that risk will be substantially lower than smoking cigarettes.”

Madam Speaker, that brings us back to this bill. You will notice in all of these recommendations,

some of which may have seemed repetitive, as I read them out, the Standing Committee clearly called upon the federal government to enact a new regulatory framework and that the provinces work in partnership with the feds to bring that about.

That brings us to the bill we have right here in the House of Assembly, a standalone bill in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and it leaves us with the question: Does this bill, as its currently written and presented to the House, and given to us just last Thursday, does this particular bill strike the right balance? Are we moving forward with enough information? Should we be taking a closer look of what other provinces and Ottawa are doing or intending to do? Should we listen to people, informed people, and engage people in this discussion?

We need to open up the discussion and bring people to the table in a public forum. And that, Madam Speaker, I guess is where the view of the Opposition is, that if we're going to have true consultation and if we're going to develop a bill that truly meets all the needs of the people in our province, we really need a broader discussion and we really need a public forum.

We need a legislation review committee, and as I said in my opening remarks, Madam Speaker, the legislation review committees were a promise of the Liberal red book and this is a great opportunity, we feel, for the Members opposite to honour that commitment to the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

So I therefore propose the following amendment, seconded by my colleague the Member for Cape St. Francis: That the motion for second reading of Bill 35, which is now before the House of Assembly, be amended by deleting all the words after the word "That" and substituting the following therefor: "*Bill No. 35, An Act To Amend The Smoke-Free Environment Act, 2005 And The Tobacco Control Act*, be not now read a second time, but that the Order be discharged, the Bill withdrawn and the subject-matter thereof referred to the Social Services Committee of the House for public consultation and review."

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune has put forth a motion and this House will now take a brief recess to consider the motion.

Recess

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

The amendment put forward by the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune, seconded by the Member for Cape St. Francis, the Speaker has found to be in order.

The Speaker recognizes the hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

This reminds me very much of the situation I watched as a teenager unfold in the UK House of Commons when you had these Fabian tactics by ministers and members who essentially represented the tobacco lobby and the manufacturers of these products.

The approach they took was simply to delay. We've seen a masterful obfuscation of the entire debate around vaping, around e-cigarettes, blowing smoke, if you like, over the whole issue. I think really this amendment is just a ploy to remove from this House the ability to make decisions about its own future and to steer its own course.

The Member opposite referenced extensively the Government of Canada having to do this, and the Government of Canada having to do that. The facts of the case are that the committee in question was a committee of the Government of Canada and was not actually in a position to make recommendations that were realistically going to be enacted by anybody else. So I think that argument fails simply at that level.

The rest of the debate, really, has not really been a debate as yet; it's simply been extensive quotations from one or two documents with the aim of muddying the waters and, as I say, blowing smoke of a kind over the whole issue. I

would urge Members on both sides of the House to take their future into their own hands and to vote on this. The due diligence has been done, and I would vote against this amendment.

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

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm pleased to get an opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 35. We're now debating an amendment, and for those that might be just tuning in to the House of Assembly this afternoon, it's a hoist amendment. I'll read it for you, and then I'll explain why we're bringing this amendment forward today:

That the motion for second reading – which is what we're doing right now – of Bill 35, which is now before the House of Assembly, be amended by deleting all the words after the word “That” and substituting the following therefor: “Bill No. 35, *An Act To Amend The Smoke-Free Environment Act, 2005 And The Tobacco Control Act*, be not now read a second time, but that the Order be discharged, the Bill withdrawn and the subject-matter thereof referred to the Social Services Committee of the House for public consultation and review.”

So that motion was presented by the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune and seconded by the Member for Cape St. Francis. We believe it's important to delay, not because of some kind of conspiracy theory as suggested by the Minister of Health and Community Services, but because there's still work to be done on this legislation. Beyond attempting to present amendments in Committee, which may or may not be in order and may or may not address all of the concerns, the hoist amendment is a mechanism that allows us to do that. We're saying let's create an opportunity for the public to have input on some of these issues.

I suspect that most of us in the House agree with the vast majority of what's proposed in Bill 35. I know I do. I don't have a problem with much of what's presented in Bill 35, but we're talking about a sizeable piece of legislation that covers a number of issues and it's really come out of the blue. I know that government, past government and current government, has been trying to

figure out how to tackle these issues for some time, so it hasn't come out of the blue in that sense; but it has come out of the blue in the sense that the first time the bill was presented to us was Thursday, there was a briefing on Friday and now we're into the debate.

Mr. Speaker, I'll acknowledge that's not uncommon. It's not uncommon at all. However, we're talking about issues that aren't quite clear cut. We're not talking about straightforward legislation. We're talking about legislation that contains some provisions that are in fact somewhat controversial.

So we haven't had a lot of time to consult with various people out there who may have strong opinions on this. We need time to understand the full implications of the bill and the public needs the chance to do the same, and also provide feedback.

I think there needs to be more opportunity to consult with those that the legislation impacts, not just health advocacy groups, not just industry, but people, people who are going to be immediately and, in some cases, significantly impacted by this legislation.

I think sending the bill to a legislation review committee and holding a series of public meetings to gather input makes sense. And in fact, in the red book of 2015, filled with election promises, the Liberals promised legislation review committees. So here's a perfect opportunity to give that a whirl and see if that approach will work, because I believe in this instance it will work. I think creating more opportunity for public consultation on matters like this makes sense.

So while the Liberals haven't yet kept that promise, this is certainly a bill that warrants further review and if nothing else, Mr. Speaker, it would open up a wider public debate about vaping and smoking and I don't think that's a bad thing. I don't smoke, I don't vape, I have no intention of doing either, but there are people out there who do vape. There are many people out there who have used vaping as a way to stop smoking. I believe that when we're talking about public health, when we're talking about the health of our population, there is a role for

legitimate harm reduction strategies. I think that vaping can contribute to that.

The minister was a little critical of my colleague for talking about the federal government, but I think it is relevant to ask the question: What's going on federally? Last year the House of Commons did receive a report from the Standing Committee on Health that was about vaping. It recommended collaborative action by Ottawa and the provinces. So we have to ask the question, Mr. Speaker: What has come of that? Why are provinces forced to act alone because the federal government isn't providing leadership on this issue?

Now we're going to see across the country a continuation of a patchwork of laws and regulations when we all ought to be on the same page on a matter of public health that affects all Canadians, and not just people in Newfoundland and Labrador and not just people in any one particular province or territory.

Another concern that I think the Member did a good job raising earlier is that some of these laws are now being challenged in the courts. So will they stand up, and if not, is there legal advice that government has obtained on whether we're on solid ground when enacting similar legislation? Those are legitimate questions that I'm hoping we'll get answers to, if not during this debate on the hoist amendment maybe in the overall second reading debate or maybe when we get into the Committee stage of debate, whether that's this afternoon, this evening or on another day.

I know there's much debate out there about whether or not vaping is a safe alternative to smoking but – and I'm not a medical expert, not a doctor, I'm not a pharmacist, I'm not a smoker. So I'm not the most qualified person to stand in this House and speak on this issue, but there are a number of people in my life who have given up smoking and have switched to vaping and swear by it and say that it's made an amazing difference in their lives.

I know there's lots of research on both sides of this debate. There is no doubt about it. As Members can tell, I'm focusing very much on the vaping issues in this bill. There are a lot of other elements of the bill that I don't have a lot

of questions about and I don't have a lot of problem with, to be frank, but I think there are some concerns being expressed by the vaping community that are worth discussing further and worth considering further.

I know lots of people who swear by vaping and believe it can actually help people quit smoking, it has helped them, and reduce the risk of illness that is caused by smoking. There are some studies out there overseas, across the pond, that suggests vaping is actually 95 per cent safer than cigarettes. Now, there's probably evidence to refute that point as well, Mr. Speaker, but the point is there's not clarity. There's an overwhelming amount of evidence on all sides of the argument and I think for that reason we need to give this some further consideration.

We don't want to do anything that normalizes the activity of smoking. To the minister's original comments today, but if vaping is used appropriately as a means of harm reduction, then it can be offered in a way, it can be provided in a way that doesn't encourage young people to partake. It's why some of our vaping shops, which have largely been self-regulated to date, don't allow minors in their stores for that very reason. That's a choice they've made themselves. This bill will actually allow minors in those stores. So there are some legitimate concerns being brought forward that I think are worthy of further discussion rather than having this bill rushed through today.

I think vaping products do need to be regulated. I do think there's risk. I do think there needs to be better regulation and that is the responsibility of the federal government. We need Health Canada and other federal agencies to step up in that regard.

One of the big concerns that's been expressed by some local retailers, local businesses and people involved in the vaping community is will vaping retailers be able to promote their products through online sites, through Facebook groups and pages. There's not consistency across the country. I think we need some clarity on the language that's actually used in this bill here. It's another example of an issue that warrants further consideration and review, and is a reason why we should delay and take more time to get public input and address some of these issues.

If most of us in this House agree with most of the things that are in Bill 35, it probably wouldn't take a considerable amount of time and effort to get to a point where hopefully more of us at the very least agree with, if not all of the things, most of the things that are in the bill. I think we can build greater consensus by allowing for more public input on some of these issues.

Under this bill, another concern is that vaping retailers won't be able to show their customers how to use vaping devices without breaking the law. I recognize there are lots of products and services we buy where we don't get an opportunity to test them out in store, but in this particular case there is a real safety issue.

We've all seen the horrific picture – I assume we've all seen the horrific pictures of these e-cigarettes exploding. Part of the challenge is if the products are used incorrectly and if the wrong products are combined with one another, there can be risk. So knowing how to use these products for those that are using them is incredibly important and being able to test those products in store is incredibly important.

The legislation as proposed actually restricts that. Whereas there are other jurisdictions in Canada that have taken a more progressive approach – I almost used the word "liberal." I'll use it; they've taken a more liberal approach – small l, not big L. I wanted to say that, Minister, but it would be unparliamentary.

There's an opportunity here for us to do the same, to take a more balanced approach, to take a more progressive approach and to look at what other jurisdictions, like Manitoba, have done. I've wrongly several times today – I need to apologize to the people of the Prairies. I've, at several points today, said Saskatchewan when I've meant Manitoba. So I want to clarify that and apologize.

The legislation that's in Manitoba is actually far more progressive than what's being proposed here. So why not delay and take the time to actually have a look at all of that and figure out if we can adopt some aspects of that legislation to make ours even better.

So I commend government for bringing this bill forward. It's been in the works for a while. I think that addressing some of these issues is critical, and anything we can do to discourage people from smoking and to prevent young people from taking up smoking to begin with, those are good things.

When it comes to flavoured tobacco, you won't hear any arguments from me. There are lots of things that are in this bill that make perfectly good sense and that I think we can all agree on, but there are some areas that are not so clear cut that require further consideration and consultation. I think reasonable people in the vaping community will acknowledge that.

Nobody is saying don't regulate. There needs to be regulations in place. It is a matter of public health, so it makes sense to regulate, but this could open up a whole host of other issues as well. There are other implications. How do people feel about the province banning menthol cigarettes? Did people know before today that this would be happening next year under this bill? Maybe it's the right thing to do, but I think there's an opportunity for the public to be more engaged in what's going on here.

Another point that my colleague raised earlier is around the potential for a black market. Will the government be creating a black market for products that will be distributed but not taxed based on some of the measures that are proposed here? I think that's a real possibility if we can't fix this legislation.

What happens next year, Mr. Speaker, when the federal government changes marijuana legislation? Does the bill anticipate the changes that might happen at that point in time, or will we be back to the drawing board and required to do more amendments? I think that's an issue that's on the horizon that's worth talking about as well while we're having this debate.

It came up in the news conference this morning that I had the opportunity to attend along with my colleague from Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune. There is a business in St. John's that will be shut down as a result of this decision, or what's proposed in this legislation. That's not in itself a reason not to proceed, but it has to be a consideration. I was pleased to hear the minister

say in the news conference that contact has been made with the owner of that business and steps are being taken to help that individual transition to a modified business, a new business. So that's important, and I don't want that to get lost in the course of this debate as well.

I have a few minutes left, so I'd like to share with you some of the feedback I have received from the public on this issue. We're speaking to the hoist amendment right now. There are lots of people out there who agree that we should take more time to consider this matter. I will have another opportunity during second reading debate to speak further to some of these issues I hope, but I do want to share some of what I've heard so far.

Many MHAs – I think all MHAs – received a note from a gentleman named Andrew Wilkins this weekend. He says: I've been vaping for just over two years. Vaping has become a lifesaver for me and has helped with my health tremendously. I was borderline COPD and vaping has prevented this from progressing, and not to mention the rest of the things it changed in my life: taste, smell, breathing, et cetera, the list goes on.

I understand that vape shops are about to undergo some changes if the bill goes through. Not being able to vape in a vape shop testing flavours, et cetera, is not fair to the customers nor to the business or the industry as a whole. Second-hand vapour is no worse than the air you breathe in walking down a busy street. I was in Toronto last week and I found it harder to breathe walking down Yonge Street than it is to sit home or to be in a vape shop chain vaping.

People have a passion and have made some serious life changes because of this industry. Why ruin the experience of going into a vape shop and hindering the industry as a whole. We are a community that are helping to save lives and to bring a healthier alternative to people's lives. I can go on and on about how this will affect the industry, but at the end of the day it's up to you guys to make this decision that will affect the industry and life-changing experience for newcomers that want to quit smoking.

I'm happy to put that on the record on behalf of one citizen of our province who is concerned. I

don't necessarily share his views completely. Personally, second-hand vapour is not something that I'm interested in breathing in. In my home, in enclosed places where I am, I don't let my friends smoke – or not smoke, sorry, vape around me. That's a matter of personal choice. I know that some of the science and some of the research are inconclusive. What I do feel confident in saying is that second-hand vapour is a heck of a lot less harmful than second-hand smoke, so I'll agree with Mr. Wilkins to at least that extent.

I do see merit in allowing vape shops the ability to have their customers test products and use products in their stores. I do think that makes sense. I don't think restricting advertising and promotion, exactly the same way that it's restricted as the tobacco industry, is reasonable and fair. I think we can take a more progressive approach than that would satisfy some of the concerns of the vaping community and the vaping industry.

I believe I have time for at least one more note, so I'll share this with you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to further opportunities to take part in the debate. One of my own constituents has been sending emails for some time to, I think, Members of government but certainly Members of the Opposition, and has been a real advocate for sensible regulations when it comes to vaping, when it comes to e-cigarettes because he knew that it was inevitable this issue would come up. Many jurisdictions in Canada have regulations in place. Many jurisdictions in Canada are waiting for the federal government to show leadership and collaborate with the provinces and territories, which I think is what's needed at this point.

He says: This bill is just awful and a terrible disappointment in the Liberals, but the disappointment in the Liberals is nothing new. I think he probably voted for me as well, Mr. Speaker, so I'm thankful for that. I don't know that to be sure.

You may recall, I sent a series of about a dozen or so emails to both yourselves and the government regarding electronic cigarettes linking approximately 100 studies, expert opinions, et cetera, in favour of vaping. I did so because e-cigarettes are much safer and they

work. I have researched them extensively. Much of what I sent has been completely disregarded by the Liberals in Bill 35. E-cigarettes have basically been equated with conventional cigarettes by this bill.

The most disturbing piece of the legislation is the inability for responsible vape-specialty shop owners, like Avalon Vapor, to allow vaping within their establishment. This will impede the ability of their store to demonstrate products and makes about much sense as not allowing people to drink in bars or test drive a car at a car dealership.

The most compelling part of this gentleman's email, Mr. Speaker, is that final lines. He says: When I was sending you emails a few months back, I was cutting down on vaping. Last week, I purchased my very first zero-nicotine juice, further evidence that vaping works. Not bad for a 32-year smoker. Why would government discourage this? Shameful. Please stand up for vaping.

What I'm trying to do this afternoon is provide a little bit of balance to this debate. It's easy for us to all rally and say smoking is bad; therefore, e-cigarettes are bad and hookah loungers are bad and it's all bad. I think a lot of people would agree, but I think we need to be fair and reasonable and balanced. I think we need to look to other jurisdictions and we'll find there are better answers out there about how to address some of these issues. That's what we're attempting to bring to this debate.

I want to commend government Members who have been listening attentively. They're actively engaged in the debate. I acknowledge that and appreciate that. I look forward to further opportunities to discuss these issues later today.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'm happy to stand and to speak to this amendment. It's the motion for the second reading of Bill 35, which is now before the House of Assembly. Of course, Mr. Speaker, on this side of the House, particularly with our caucus, we have consistently and constantly talked about the need to be able to bring legislation before the appropriate committees, legislative committees.

It helps us to limit the time that we would need to spend in the House on particular legislation if we could work out some of the legislation beforehand and come to agreement on certain aspects of legislation, or also strongly indicate any opposition to certain aspects of legislation that a lot of work can be done at the committee structure.

To not use the committee structure – and although this government has said that they are going to use a committee structure, they've been at the helm now for six months and we're not seeing it being used, which I think is really unfortunate. Also is that yet another promise that they are breaking?

We need to be able to use every democratic tool at our disposal when we are looking at legislation, when all of us in this hon. House are doing the work that we have been elected to do. Imagine Bill 29, *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, imagine if that had gone to a committee structure. Imagine if the Independent Appointments Commission had gone to a committee structure, where we would have looked at the whole issue of gender inclusion and whether or not any of the bills had gone through a gender lens perspective.

How important it is – this is a tool available to our democratic process, a tool that is available to our parliamentary process, a tool that enables us as this House to come out with the best, responsive, most progressive and timely legislation that is in the best interest of the people. That's what committee structure legislative reviews and committee structures are able to do, and I believe it is a shame at this point, Mr. Speaker, that once again we see that government is not allowing – not only are they not using it, but they are prohibiting the democratic tools that are available, at our disposal, from being used.

What it does is it impoverishes the work that we do together, all of us in this House. It cuts off possibilities, possibilities of coming up with the best legislation possible. So that then when we come to this House the meaningful debates that we undertake, becomes that much more enriched and informed, and that it also enables the possibility of working together and coming at some of our legislation in a more consensus-based way. Why government would not use that, but not only just use it but encourage that, is beyond me. It's a valuable tool that should be made available to us. I believe that in light of that I would support this hoist amendment.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to speak to the main issue that we are debating here today and Bill 35. Many of us in this House were smokers. I bet you at least half of us in this House have been smokers. Many of us, because we're over a certain age, can remember times when you could smoke on airplanes.

I can remember when you could smoke on airplanes. Eventually then, what would happen was that only the front half of the airplane could smoke and the back half would be relegated smoke free. So here you are hurdling through the air in a tin can and half the people could smoke, the front half of the airplane couldn't smoke, as if that really protected anybody.

I can remember when you could smoke on buses. I can remember when there were ashtrays on buses. I can remember when you could smoke on trains. We used to have trains. Not only could you used to smoke on trains, we used to have trains. I can remember –

AN HON. MEMBER: Remember we could smoke in bars.

MS. ROGERS: What's that?

AN HON. MEMBER: Remember we could smoke in bars.

MS. ROGERS: Yes, I can remember when you could smoke in bars. I can remember when –

AN HON. MEMBER: In hospitals.

MS. ROGERS: I was going to get to that. I can remember when bank tellers used to smoke. I

can remember when you could smoke at work. I can remember sitting in boardrooms with about 12 people and 10 of them smoked and two of them didn't. I can remember at times the two people who didn't smoke, how ill they felt because of us smokers.

I can remember hospitals at a time when anybody could smoke in a hospital. Then it changed and only the patients could smoke in the hospital, not the visitors. Then nobody could smoke in a hospital and everybody would smoke outside in front of the hospital. Then the perimeter around the hospital just became further and further away when and where you could smoke. I can remember so many changes around the area of smoking.

I was a filmmaker for over 30 years and I was once contracted by Health and Welfare Canada to do a film around women and smoking. At that time, a wonderful sociologist in the UK wrote a book called, Smoking is a Feminist Issue – I can't remember her name, specifically. So I was tasked with looking at what kind of audiovisual – because we could see that the number of women who were smoking was growing. There's a reason for that, because the tobacco industry was a multi-million – probably multi-billion dollar industry worldwide now. When you look at the history of the commercial introduction of smoking into North America and in Europe, it's very, very interesting to see how that industry worked.

Once it got to the point that the male market was saturated, because the male market was saturated – I mean, whose dad in this House didn't smoke. Almost every man in North America smoked. Not because it was natural to smoke, but because there was an effort by tobacco companies to get people to smoke. There was advertising, there was a time when – when my dad was in the Armed Forces he was given cigarettes as rations.

I had friends who worked for tobacco companies and part of their pay was they would be given every payday cartons of cigarettes along with their pay. Sometimes they were given more cigarettes than they would actually smoke themselves, so they would give cigarettes to their friends. There was also a time when cigarettes were handed out freely in bars or hotels or at special kinds of marketing events

that had absolutely nothing to do with cigarettes, but cigarettes were part of that.

I had a friend in the film industry who was not a smoker and he worked for the National Film Board of Canada and he was tasked – he was a staff filmmaker at the National Film Board of Canada and he was tasked with making an anti-smoking commercial. He was dressed as a vampire – some folks here in the House may remember that particular NFB ad and short film about smoking and the bad effects of smoking. He acted in the film as well, as one of the animators in the film. So, on the set there were cigarettes everywhere, because that was part of the film. As a matter of fact, he was in his thirties and he started smoking doing that particular ad. Imagine, how ironic is that?

The tobacco industry saw that the male market for smoking was saturated, and then they figured, what's our next targeted area? The next targeted area was women, because women at that time weren't smoking. It was seen as unseemly for women to smoke, or only harsh, certain types of women smoked. So what happened then is that the tobacco companies decided to target women to try and get women to smoke, because they wanted to expand their sales.

Do you know how they did that, Mr. Speaker? Lucky Strikes, for instance, the man who was the owner of Lucky Strikes, or certainly one of their top executives, was being driven in his limousine one day. He was driving through a certain part, it was in the Southern States, and he saw two really large women sitting outside their door on a door stoop, and he thought: grab a Lucky instead of a sweet. He started correlating women with smoking and losing weight. So that's kind of interesting.

Women in movies were then paid to smoke so that it could show that it was okay for women to smoke. Again, until then it was only women of certain ill repute who were smoking. Movie stars, female movie stars were actually paid to smoke in their movies. That was one way of getting women to smoke.

This is very interesting, doctors were paid to get women to smoke as well. As a matter of fact, you can see ads around the '50s – in women's

magazines in the '50s where doctors recommended women to smoke for their nerves. Imagine, doctors actually prescribed that women should smoke. It's good for your nerves, it'll calm your nerves, and particularly women who were pregnant to help you through pregnancy.

As the Minister of Health and Community Services mentioned earlier in our debate, the strength of the tobacco lobby and then also the lobby now around the issue of e-cigarettes and vaping, that the strength of that lobby – because let's not forget what this is. This is a multi-million, perhaps multi-billion dollar industry, and as we see more and more people quitting smoking, we do see this movement and this lobby towards vaping. What does that mean for us?

The other interesting thing is that in different parts of the world tobacco advertising was prohibited, particularly in some Third World Countries. In fact, what would happen is that the tobacco company – say there was a little cantina somewhere in a small, rural area, tobacco companies were not allowed to put up signs advertising tobacco, and the stores weren't allowed to put up signs. So what would happen is that tobacco companies would offer to paint the outside of the store in the colours that represented a certain brand of cigarettes – very ingenious. So let's not forget really what we're dealing with, with the tobacco industry and also with this whole industry when we look at vaping. It's a powerful, powerful industry.

Now, the other thing about tobacco and cigarettes was that if used as intended, if really used as intended, it's one of the few products that will actually harm you that are allowed. It will actually harm you. We know that. There's no if, ands or buts. There was a time, let's not forget, in our history when not only was it permissible, but it was even encouraged by the medical establishment, before we knew the full range of health risks around tobacco.

One of the very unfortunate things is that people who smoke cigarettes, many of us in this House or family members or friends or community members, started very young because we could, because it was cool and we didn't really know the health effects.

The other thing is we know that heart disease and lung disease, for a number of years, was a disease among men, but we do know now, too, that once you start tracking when women started smoking full-time because of all the – it didn't just happen again; we're not natural smokers. You have to learn to smoke. The first few cigarettes you're coughing and hacking and it's not enjoyable, but it's the whole lobby, the whole tobacco industry. We'll see this with vaping as well, that – I've lost my train of thought on that. Anyway, it's a very concerted effort. This is about industry as well.

We worked so hard on the issues of smoking. How hard did we work on those issues? We can remember the push back against regulating whether or not you could smoke in public places, at a time when we could smoke on planes, boats and trains, restaurants, movie theatres. Remember when there were little ashtrays on the arm of your movie theatre?

We were smoking everywhere, even in hospitals, because there wasn't a whole lot of research on the health effects of smoking. When there was, it took so much lobbying by people in the health profession, by anti-smoking groups, how hard people had to work to get us to the point where we are today. I am so grateful that we are where we are today because of regulations around smoking. But it took so much work and, again, it was activists who led us to this point, who pushed government, who pushed municipal leaders, federal leaders and provincial leaders to enact the type of smoking regulations that we live with today.

There was so much resistance. How many bar owners, other people and smokers were saying that bars will close down if you ban smoking in bars. We can all remember that. To remember the fear about that – bars will close down; restaurants will close down. The pushback was incredible.

I know that the bars now – the other thing that's very interesting is that it took a while for legislation to see that bars were also not a place of entertainment, but they were workplaces as well for people who were working as waiters, people who were working in the entertainment industry. It's very interesting the research that has been done around people who were waiters

in bars and restaurants and who suffered the effects of the smoke in their workplace – sometimes they were smokers themselves, but also the second-hand smoke.

This really is about saving lives, the whole issue of making smoke-free environments. So bars did not close down and restaurants did not close down. As a matter fact, there are more people who stopped going to bars because – I can remember going to bars where there was so much smoke that you were so hung over from the smoke the next day.

There were these half-hearted attempts of smoker eaters in half the bar. Maybe you could only smoke – I can remember going to the Ship Inn where you could only smoke in half the bar, and then there was so many of us that were smokers that it was so crowded in that half of the bar and the other half of the bar there was hardly anybody. Then some of the people who didn't smoke who wanted to be with us cool and groovy smokers would come on over to our side, regardless of the fact that all the smoke was happening there.

We also see that we do not know, the same as we didn't know how bad smoking was for us – and the chemical soup that's not only in the tobacco, but it's in the paper for the tobacco, we didn't know how bad it was for you. We know now, but people still have their free choice to smoke. People can get cigarettes. They're really expensive, but they can get cigarettes, they can get cigars and they can smoke.

There are restrictions on where you can buy tobacco, where you can buy cigarettes, how it can or cannot be promoted and also who can buy them and who can't buy them. People who are smokers can get cigarettes, so I believe that the extension now to looking at the whole issue of vaping – vaping has been seen as a harm-reduction approach to smoking. I firmly believe there is some truth to that. I firmly support that as well. Many of us have family Members or friends who have found it so incredibly hard to give up smoking. Many of us have gone through that in our own lives here in this House. Quitting smoking is really tough. It's not an easy thing.

Some people have graduated – moved from actually smoking cigarettes to vaping. For some

people, it has made the process of stopping smoking easier. That's a good thing. That's really a good thing.

Harm reduction, basically, is not about making something easier in case you want to start doing it. When we look at harm reduction in the area of drug addiction or in the area of alcohol addiction, what we're doing is looking at what's the best way to help people who are already dealing with an addiction.

That's what harm reduction is about. It's not about making it easier for someone to start; it's about making it easier and more compassionate, and looking at the best way to help improve someone's health who is dealing with addiction or substance reliance. That's what harm reduction is about. We have to look at that in terms of vaping. Absolutely, I agree with that. I totally agree with that.

This legislation is not doing anything to stop that. They're not doing anything to stop the issue of access to reduce that.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: I'm going to wrap this right up, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, I look forward to continuing to speak about the issue of harm reduction and this bill.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Thank you for acknowledging me this afternoon so I can rise and speak to the hoist amendment that's before the House. The hoist amendment is essentially an amendment to a bill to take it off the floor of the House of Assembly, and to give direction for the Social Services Committee of the House, which is made up of Members of the House, to take the bill, take the implications of

the bill, the desired changes that the government has put forward today, and to take it outside the House and take it for public consultation.

Mr. Speaker, we can't forget this bill is more than just an amendment that would be procedural, or sometimes we will get bills come here that are changing a comma or where it's putting an extra section or clause, or small types of amendments that are maintenance on bills because there's some kind of legal technicality with it and that type of thing. That's not what this is.

This is a fairly comprehensive bill, An Act to Amend the Smoke-Free Environment Act, 2005 and the Tobacco Control Act, which is a fairly substantial, important bill because it's really about people's health and well-being. The hoist amendment is to say, look, let's take this out and bring this to consultation; that's what this is about.

The reason why we brought this forward is because we've had a fair bit of interest from the public on this particular bill. Both people who call or email or say, look, this is a good thing, and those who are critical of the bill. Even when we had discussions in our caucus, if you nail down to it in our initial discussions, we had some that were in favour of some parts of the bill, didn't understand or know the implications of other sections or had some concerns about it – some did and some didn't. Some that felt there are parts there that shouldn't go forward at all; others weren't so much.

So even our own caucus felt that it's necessary for us to have a more in-depth discussion about the implications of each part of the bill and I think our caucus is reflective of what we're hearing from the general public. That's what the hoist amendment is about that we're now debating, is to pull it off the floor, send it out for consultation.

Let's not forget, Mr. Speaker, this is a government who had prided itself, and over and over again in the days and weeks and months leading up to the election last year, on saying that they're going to consult with the people, they're going to contact the people, they're going to speak to the people of the province and

they're going to lead by listening and listen to what the people of the province have to say.

Now, in our previous time in government – the minister referenced this earlier today – we were going to bring forward a piece of legislation, and we were. Still hadn't settled on the work for it – I know they've worked towards it, because they're six months now in office and it's the first time we've seen this legislation come forward. I would expect that they were still doing more work on it. We know that consultation needs to be done, not just internally with government departments, but broadly with stakeholder groups and with individual citizens who feel very strongly about something as important as smoking, because that's what this is about. This is about making amendments that relate directly to smokers.

For anybody who has ever quit smoking, we know it's hard to do. I have often used – in my younger years (inaudible) smoker now in my younger years as a smoker and I've told people lots of times, anybody I see smoking, I say, look, quitting smoking is easy to do; I've done it hundreds of times. I meant it, because I did. And I know lots of people who've quit hundreds of times, unsuccessful, went back and tried again, tried again and tried again. Anybody who has ever quit smoking knows that. That's why this is so important because as my colleague for Mount Pearl North referenced he knows people and I know people as well who say well I've switched from smoking tobacco to vaping. I feel healthier, I feel better, and I feel my overall health has improved.

I heard a number today that something like 80 per cent of people who vape, with the idea and concept of quitting smoking, actually do and are successful in quitting smoking. So it's an important bill from that perspective, but there are those who are saying well part of the culture – and I don't know anything about the culture of vaping, but I can only go by some of the things we're told is that some of the amendments here are going to have a negative implication on the number of people who vape and how they use it to the best of their ability.

My understanding is you can go into a store today; you can pick and choose, look at the different products, test them and so on and find

the one that suits you best. If that's the way it is and that helps you decide what is going to work for you best and leads to you quitting smoking, then that is probably a good thing. But we don't know that until we talk to people, Mr. Speaker. When we talk to people, we find those things out.

Just last week, the Minister of Health made an announcement regarding lifeguards, about increased access to trained lifeguards. In his release – and this speaks to consultation, Mr. Speaker, before the Members opposite start saying what is the relevance of that, but it speaks to consultation. In the minister's statements – and I'm sure he read them with full belief that they were true and accurate – he said these changes come at the recommendations of Recreation Newfoundland and Labrador, the Lifesaving Society and the Canadian Red Cross.

Well, I've received a copy of the letter to the minister that was sent over the weekend from the Lifesaving Society, the Newfoundland and Labrador branch, the president of the Newfoundland and Labrador branch, who says that they are not in agreement with this change. They say no, no, hang on now. What the minister said last week is not correct. We're not in agreement with the change on Canada's lifeguarding. They quote themselves as Canada's lifeguarding experts do not agree with the addition of second standard lifeguarding qualifications. The letter actually goes on to say that we did not approve the introduction of a second standard for lifeguards.

So they didn't approve, they don't agree with it; however, the information that the minister had was that they did. That's an important matter too; life safety and water safety is an important matter and the minister was advised that three significant organizations that operate in our province were all in agreement, and one of them says now – and copied me on a letter – no, we weren't in agreement. That's not correct.

So when you have something as important as people's health – and I'm sure the minister would agree – it's important that the right considerations and the right things be done. That's why we believe it's important to listen to what people have to say. And we know that there's still tons of evidence that is mounting for

and against, and giving you different opinions on is vaping a good thing or a bad thing.

I think it would be worthy for this to be passed off to the Committee, to the Social Services Committee of the House of Assembly to conduct a consultation process with Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, with those who have a vested interest in this, and stakeholders involved with the smoking. There are lots of smoking groups and so on, retailers and so on that would be impacted by this legislation. I think it's important to talk to all of them. That's why we have the hoist amendment to take it off the floor and to do that consultation. We'll support that amendment which is now being debated.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is certainly a pleasure to stand in this House today to speak to Bill 35, An Act to Amend the Smoke-Free Environment Act and the Tobacco Control Act. Mr. Speaker, I guess I would say off the get-go that I will be supporting the amendment; but, that said, should the amendment fail, which I suspect it will fail – I'd be surprised if it went through. But if it did fail, I would be supporting the bill. The reason why I'm supporting the bill is because there are important things in the bill that I believe need to be supported and I believe that we all agree with.

It's almost like an ominous bill, to some degree; there are good parts in the bill and then there are areas where there are concerns. There are areas where people have expressed concerns to me and there are areas where I share those concerns. But looking at the greater good, I would have to support the bill because I do agree that we need to regulate this industry, we need to regulate vaping and we need to have legislation in place to deal with hookah and all those other things. We need to regular the flavoured tobacco, menthol cigarettes perhaps, and all those things because we all know – and it's been proven through science – the damage, the harm, that smoking causes to people.

I think we also know – through the information I've received at least – that while there is a much lesser degree of harm with vaping, it is still inconclusive and there could be some degree of harm. The number I've heard is 95 per cent better than cigarettes, and again that is up in the air. So there is still that 5 per cent. So I understand why we would want to regulate and the industry understands why we would want to regulate.

I actually took it upon myself on Saturday to visit a vape shop in the St. John's area to talk to the owner and go into the shop and see what it was all about, because I had no idea what vaping was all about. I have seen a couple of people with those e-cigarettes or whatever but I didn't really understand it other than you're blowing out vapour instead of smoke and it is supposed to, I guess, simulate smoking but not be as harmful.

I wanted to educate myself a little bit more on it, so I actually went to a vape shop and went in, like I said, talked to the owner, looked at some of the samples and the set up. I didn't try it. I didn't try the vaping. I will admit that, but I did want to educate myself on it.

In speaking to the owner of that particular establishment, the owner quite clearly indicated to me that he had no problem with much of the legislation. As an industry, they had no problem with it. I said, well, are you just speaking for yourself or are you speaking for others? Is there like a vaping industry association or whatever? Is there like a group that gets together of all the owners and so on?

There is no official organization here in Newfoundland, but he said that all the vape shops are part of some group. They have like this website or whatever, Facebook or whatever, that sort of – they all feed into and they all communicate with each other. They all know each other. They have communicated with each other over Bill 35. According to him at least, they're pretty unanimous in their views on this whole Bill 35 legislation.

Actually, at the government news conference that happened today, I think a number of them, they indicated to me, were actually going to go to the news conference, sit in on it and see if

they could figure out what the implications would be. Now, I did get contacted after the fact. They said a lot of the questions they had certainly were not answered in that news conference. So they do have some questions and concerns.

The main issue they have, at least has been expressed to me – first of all, they have no issue with the fact that children should not be vaping. Even though there is no regulation in place, they do regulate themselves. The owner I talked to said, listen, if you're not 19, you're not allowed in my shop; I actually ID people. They will not let them in.

Now, I'm just taking that man's word for it. I had no reason to not take him at his word. He said we regulate ourselves. If you're under 19, you're not coming in the shop. We don't let anyone in the shop. That's been their own practice. They do not believe that minors should be vaping. That's one thing they agree with.

The same as with cigarettes, they agree you shouldn't be allowed to vape in your car if you've got children in your car. The same as you're not allowed to smoke in your car if you have children in your car. They agree. That should be the same. No issue there.

They agree with the fact that you shouldn't be allowed to vape in public places. Now, I'm going to get to the definition of a public place in a second because that's where we do get a little bit of concern, but in general they agree with the fact that you shouldn't be able to smoke in public places.

In other words, if you go into a bar and you're not allowed to smoke in a bar, then you shouldn't be allowed to vape in a bar. If you go to the mall and you're not allowed to smoke in the mall, then you shouldn't be able to vape in the mall. If you go to the hospital and you – anyway, you get the picture.

If you go in any of these public places or what have you, they are agreeing – at least the owner I spoke to – saying the same rules should apply as cigarettes, because people shouldn't be exposed to the vapour. Even though the vapour – they believe or a lot of people believe – is harmless and a lot of the evidence suggests it's 95 per

cent less harmful than cigarettes, but they still believe you shouldn't be able to vape in a public area where someone would be exposed to it.

Which is why they also agree that you shouldn't be able to test the different – what do they call it? I think the term is vape juice. You shouldn't be able to test vape juice at a retail location where there are other products being sold. In other words, if you could buy – I'm not sure where you can buy this stuff to be honest with you, besides a vape shop. I think you can buy it in other stores, but if you went up to Marie's Mini Mart – I will just use that as a random example – and there are cigarettes there, so now I'm guessing you can buy vape juice and vapours and all that stuff at Marie's Mini Mart.

What they're saying is they would agree that you shouldn't be able to test those juices and blow the vapour around in Marie's Mini Mart because there are members of the general public coming in and out of the store. Maybe they're buying a loaf of bread or a quart of milk, or maybe there's a gas bar and they're paying for their gas. As a member of the general public I shouldn't be exposed to – I shouldn't have to walk into the store and there's someone testing this and blowing this vapour around. Now, I'm being exposed to it. They agree with that part of the legislation that you shouldn't be allowed to do that.

So far, as you can see, they're pretty much on board with all the legislation. The part where they have the concern, and I know this has been raised, or I think it's been raised, is if you go into a vape shop and it is just that, a vape shop, there's nothing else. Nobody would have a reason to go in there only to buy or try or whatever the vape cigarettes and the juice or whatever the case might be. There's no other reason to go there. Nobody would have a reason to go there. It's a separate business.

The only purpose to go there is I'm going there to get my vapour cigarette or get my juice for my cigarette, or whatever the case might be. Then their concern is, if the only people going there are people who are going there for that specific purpose, then why can't they sample the different juices while they're there in order to decide what they're going to purchase, and why can't they be shown how to use it.

Now, that's not saying they're promoting – or certainly I don't agree with we're promoting, let's get kids, let's get people hooked on vape. Let's get them vaping instead of smoking. They're not saying that. I'm certainly not saying that, but what they're saying is that a lot of people who vape are doing so because they want to quit smoking. That's the purpose. They're there to quit smoking, and this is no different than the patch or nicotine gum or whatever the other things that have been used over the years to try to quit smoking.

So, people go there. They're telling me all their customers are smokers or people wanting to quit smoking. Again, I was told, that's 100 per cent of our customer base. Now, could somebody go there out of curiosity? Is that possible to say, yeah, I'm going to make a trip to a vape shop to see what this is all about. Is that possible? I suppose anything is possible, but as a general rule the people going there are smokers, and they're going there because they want an alternative to smoking because they know smoking is going to cause them irreparable harm.

The evidence shows that, whether it's heart disease or cancer or different lung diseases, whatever the case might be, we know that with cigarettes. They're looking for an alternative. They go to the vape shop for the alternative that's much safer for them to use, much safer. So, if somebody is going there, there's an obvious benefit to that. They're saying why would you want to regulate a way or to discourage, at least, somebody trying to get off the cigarettes? Why would you want to do that, particularly if in the process of helping that person, you're causing no harm to anybody else, because there's nobody else going in there, only the person who's a smoker for that specific purpose? So why would you do it?

The other thing is that – again, what they told me was that – when you go to a vape shop and you're testing the different flavours to see which one you like or whatever the case might be, the sample flavours they use when they're testing the flavours or whatever, there's no nicotine. There's none. The juice has different levels of nicotine in the juice.

If you're someone who's a heavy smoker, when you first start, you start off with a juice with a flavour and it's got like a higher proportion of nicotine. Then eventually, you get like the next bottle of juice or maybe 10 bottles of juice later, I don't know, it's less nicotine, less nicotine, less nicotine. Eventually, you get down to zero and that would be the ultimate goal.

When you're actually going in to simply test the flavour, when you're going in to get someone to show you how to use the thing, the sample that they use is zero nicotine – zero. There's nothing there at all. What is the harm in allowing that practice to happen? Who are you hurting? All you're doing is helping somebody and you could argue you're hurting nobody.

The only thing, the only argument that held any water with me when I went to a little briefing this morning, which I initiated myself – the only thing that could possibly hold any water that I could see in that argument would be what about the staff because of occupational health and safety and if someone is exposed. That was one of the reasons why we cut out smoking in bars and all that kind of stuff because if somebody works in a bar as a waitress, a bartender, whatever the case might be, and they're exposed to all this second-hand smoke, that's not fair. They shouldn't have to be. The only argument at all would be that staff person.

You could certainly make the argument – I know the one that I went to, all the people working there were all ex-smokers and they vape anyway themselves. I suppose someone could choose to work there who didn't smoke and didn't vape, but I suppose there's always a choice. They don't have to go there to work either. It's only a few shops and I guess they don't have to go there to work if they know that vape is there.

The other thing that is a possibility, maybe – I know that when it comes to other types of chemicals and smoke inhalants and so on in a workplace, a lot of times there are engineering controls you can put in place to mitigate against the risk. I don't know the exact piece of equipment or if it is cost-prohibitive or not, but, in theory only, maybe somebody when they are actually testing the thing and the vapour comes out, maybe there is a fan or a little hood or

something that you stick your head in there and you suck in the smoke and it goes through a hose or something and out through the side of the building somewhere, up in the atmosphere so that there is no vapour because it is just getting sucked through a fan or something.

Maybe that's a possibility. I know it's used. It's used in workplaces, paint shops and sign shops – they are huge industrial ones, so you wouldn't want to go with anything that is going to be cost-prohibitive. But there is lots of technology; maybe there is some little device that could work.

The point is, whether that's an option or not, the problem we have, Mr. Speaker, is that these options were never explored. The reason why they were never explored is because there was zero consultation – zero. When I went down there and I asked them, I said well, surely, somebody from the department or the departments involved must have contacted you. I mean, they are regulating your industry. They must have contacted you and you must have had some feedback into this. They said: Paul, as God as my witness, nobody contacted me. I said: Well, maybe you're out of the loop; maybe they contacted the other shops and they missed you. Paul, I have spoken to everybody; nobody contacted us.

So I went to a briefing this morning and I asked the question: How many people in the industry did you contact as part of your public consultation – these are stakeholders involved in this industry, when did you contact them? When did they have their input? I was told they didn't have any input. There was no consultation. It didn't happen.

There in itself lies a big problem because had there been some consultation with the people in the industry and some other, perhaps, public consultation, maybe the legislation could have been tweaked a little bit so that it could work for everybody. That is all they are saying. That is all I'm saying. I think that's all everybody is saying, to be honest with you. I think that is all everybody is saying, is that if there had to be more consultation, it could have been tweaked to have better legislation, which ties into what has been said about the whole concept of an all-party committee or whatever.

I understand, like government would say, my God, we'd never get any legislation through; we have to go to all-party committees, delay everything. No one is saying delay everything, but while this legislation was being developed over however long a period of time, that could have gone through a committee by now.

By the time it got to the House, it would have gone through. You could have done some public consultation and perhaps we'd have a piece of legislation that works for the public, works for all Members in the House, works for the industry and something that we can all agree on.

Like I said, Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, I will vote – I'm going to vote in favour of the amendment because I really think we need to tweak this. I think that we need to make a few improvements here that obviously are not going to happen here today, but perhaps through that process it can be done. In the absence of that, even though I'm voting for the amendment, as I said, I'm also going to vote for the legislation because I believe the greater good that even the industry – the vaping industry agrees with the greater good of all these measures.

I can't vote against all the good stuff because there are a couple of things that I disagree with or I think are bad or ill thought out, ill-conceived and not thought out properly. I can't go against all the good stuff because of that, so I'm going to vote for it. Again, I feel like it's almost like an omnibus bill, to some degree, where you're being forced to vote for stuff that you don't agree with because there's stuff there that you do agree with.

So that's kind of where I'm at with it. I would say to the government, to the ministers involved, I think you should have a serious look at the amendment which has been brought forward. I think that we could do a review; you can consult with the industry, consult with all the other stakeholders and come up with something that's going to be more palatable and sensible for everybody. It's a great initiative to stop the smoking.

Maybe – just a thought – as an amendment you proceed with all the stuff on the flavoured tobacco and the menthol cigarettes, all that part, put that through as is. That's all cigarettes and

tobacco, put that through as is and just simply let's take out the vaping piece even, and let's review that part with the industry first. The other stuff, I think we'd all agree on the other part. I think that's what we can do.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to take my seat. When we do get to Committee of the Whole, I have a couple of specific questions that have been given to me by people in the industry that I will be asking the minister on. For now, I'm going to take my seat and see what everybody else has to say about this matter.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Seeing no further speakers, there is a motion for an amendment on the floor that was moved by the hon. Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune and seconded by the hon. Member for Cape St. Francis.

All those in favour of the amendment?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: All those against?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

MR. SPEAKER: The motion for amendment has been defeated.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm glad to have another opportunity to speak to Bill 35. Now that the hoist amendment has been defeated, we are back to the main motion here in second reading.

Later this evening, in the not-to-distant future, I suspect we'll go to the Committee stage where we can ask the minister more detailed questions and provide more detailed comments on the various pieces that are in the legislation. As the previous speaker highlighted, there are lots of things in this bill that we do support but there are some legitimate concerns that we feel haven't been adequately addressed and we have a responsibility to bring those things forward to the House of Assembly and make sure they are heard.

I've heard directly from, not only some people who have used e-cigarettes or vapours, as they are often called, but also I have heard from some people in the industry who operate businesses. A number of them have said to me, they are all for fair regulations such as age restriction, use in public places, use in vehicles with children. They agree that those things make sense and they should be included in regulations.

That's not at all what we're talking about here this evening. Those are provisions and those are steps that need to happen and make good sense. It's good that government is moving on those aspects of the legislation; however, there are a number of areas in this bill where the legislation just goes too far.

Some of the advocates for vaping drew my attention to a 200-page report from the United Kingdom on e-cigarettes from the Royal College of Physicians. It's a fairly credible, objective report as opposed to one that's been paid for by industry or is being driven by industry. When it's the Royal College of Physicians, I think it deserves a little bit more attention than some of the other studies that are floating around out there.

I guess what it highlights to me is that this really needs to be a debate about harm reduction. Simplistically put, based on everything we've seen so far, many of us believe that vaping is far less harmful than smoking cigarettes. So if you accept that logic, then there are elements of this bill that just go too far in making it difficult and potentially even unsafe for people to vape. That's why we need to raise concerns.

I encourage people to think about this issue from a harm reduction perspective. Ideally, everybody who smokes would quit cold turkey and that would be great, but that's not realistic. As the Leader of the Opposition outlined, that's just not practical, it's not sensible. It doesn't work for a lot of people. So that needs to be considered in all of this.

We shouldn't be putting up roadblocks that will inhibit smokers from switching from tobacco to an electronic cigarette product, because we want to reduce harm and switching to electronic cigarettes is not cold turkey but it's an incredible

risk reduction. It goes a long way to reduce harm. So that needs to be considered as well.

I'd like to highlight some of the other concerns that have been brought forward by industry to express concerns about this legislation. Not allowing customers to vape in shops means shops can't allow customers to sample products or try products which would be a deterrent, and it's not good for harm reduction. It's also an inconvenience to customers who need to experience the product in an effort to quit or to stay away from tobacco.

Again, Mr. Speaker, as I said the last time I spoke on this legislation, I don't speak from first-hand experience, which puts me at a bit of a disadvantage, but I've talked to multiple people who are telling me the same thing. So if multiple people that I've had contact from, and had contact with, are expressing very, very similar concerns then it tells me those are concerns that need to be brought forward as part of this debate.

Businesses that are involved in this sector are concerned about some of the advertising restrictions that seem to be proposed in this bill. They're concerned about their website and their social media accounts, Instagram and Twitter, which there was some discussion about in this House last week. Even Facebook groups and Facebook pages, there are support groups and advocacy groups online for people who are involved in vaping. These are people who have quit smoking.

My view is that vaping should only be used as a form of harm reduction. For the vast majority of people that I've encountered, that's in fact the case. So those social media channels have been a prime way for these businesses to reach the customers, provide important information on products, on legislation, on various pieces of research that are out there.

It appears the advertising laws that are in Bill 35 could effectively shut down these modes of communication and conversation and limit the information these businesses can actually provide to their customers. Again, from a harm-reduction perspective, I have a hard time with that, which is why I'm speaking again to this legislation.

If educating customers on the proper use of electronic cigarettes is considered advertising, that's a real challenge, because there could be risk to customers. Incorrectly using these devices that have a high-powered battery attached to them can obviously be dangerous. That goes not only for the in-store education, but on Facebook, communication via email, on the web, or whatever the case may be.

Another concern I have overall about this bill, Mr. Speaker, is that in many cases the bill references smoking when talking about e-cigarette use. E-cigarettes don't create the by-products of combustion. They don't produce smoke. They produce an aerosol vapour mist that is not a result of combustion, and thus can't be called or considered smoke. So I think that needs to be clarified before this bill becomes law, as smoking and vaping is not the same thing. They may look the same.

The minister in her opening comments today, I was amazed to hear her say, well, they look the same. They may look the same, but they're entirely different actions and they can't be treated as the same. By lumping smoking and vaping together as one action it brings up the perceived effect that both items have the same risks, but that is not the case and it shouldn't be reflected in this bill. So I believe that point needs to be made.

I'd like to highlight some other concerns I have with this legislation in the time I have left.

The bill talks about regulating the promotion and display of vapour products and non-tobacco shisha in the same manner that the act currently regulates tobacco promotion and display. I think that's extreme, Mr. Speaker. I understand there's a need to regulate. Everybody I've talked to in the industry supports regulation, that's not what we're challenging here, but consumers have the right to information about vapour products. Regulating promotion of those products as harshly as tobacco I think is an impediment to harm reduction, and I think that needs to be considered.

Making online sales and social media interaction with customers unlawful would actually restrict access to rural areas as well. There aren't vape shops in every corner of the province. These

products are not available in physical locations in every corner of the province. So that online component is really important.

If it means that fewer will smoke and people will transition to vaping as a means of harm reduction and hopefully, ultimately, not do either – and I know of lots of people where that's been the case – then that's a good thing. We need to have sensible regulations that allow for that transition to happen.

Mr. Speaker, vapour products are not tobacco products. Maybe there's an argument to be made that there should be different sections within this bill that address vapour products exclusively. Maybe it should have its own legislation or be covered through its own bill. I really think through what's proposed here in this legislation, it will harm those businesses that are running reputable, reasonable businesses. It will prevent them from using social media to communicate with and educate their customers.

I also take exception, Mr. Speaker, to the definition of e-cigarette. I think that e-substance should be substituted perhaps with e-liquid. The way it's worded right now it appears that – and we'll get more into this in the Committee stage of course, but it appears that a fog machine would be considered an e-cigarette the way it's currently outlined. So there's a need to really delineate between the issues here and make it really clear that vaping is not smoking. They're very different, the apparatuses are different and the regulation needs to be somewhat different as well.

Even the definition of smoking in this legislation is troublesome: “to inhale or exhale vapour from an e-cigarette or to hold or otherwise have control over an activated e-cigarette ...” – it's just something along those lines. There's no combustion, so there's no smoke, so it can't be considered smoking. If there is no smoke and no combustion, then it's clearly not smoking.

There's also talk in the legislation of smoking rooms. I think absolutely forcing vapours into smoking areas, one of the advocates said to me today that's much like having an AA meeting at a bar. It might be okay for some, but I think to define it that way and to restrict it in that way is not a sensible approach. I think there's a more

progressive more balanced better way of tackling that issue as well.

Even the definition of e-cigarette in the legislation, Mr. Speaker, it's a broad definition and also includes devices such as marijuana vaporizers the way it's presently defined. Well, that's not what we're talking about here. I think there's more debate and discussion required to get this to a sensible place.

One of the things that are positive in the legislation is that it's going to be an offence for not only retailers but anyone to sell products to a minor. So those are common sense changes that we support and nobody is going to argue against that, and I think industry and the vaping community would support those kinds of changes as well. So again, it is not all bad. There are lots of good things in Bill 35, but there are also some major issues that we think should be addressed.

There is another area where tobacco vapour products and non-tobacco shisha include the package in which the tobacco vapour products or non-tobacco shisha are sold. There's a challenge around not allowing these products to be tested in stores. If those operating these stores can't teach a customer to use the product correctly, to use the product properly, then there could be a risk. There could be a safety risk to those customers and a liability risk to the business as well.

I think customers need to have a right to view the product before purchasing. I think some of the language in the bill, there is an argument that vapour products should be exempt in certain sections. Again, it needs to be more clearly defined how the two are different.

The point about advertising, I'd like to touch on again. The bill suggests there be no advertising outside of the shop, and that implies that online – and some provinces have gone this far. It implies that this would block the ability to have an online store which could serve rural areas and meet their harm-reduction needs. Social media – I've gone and checked it out myself; I encourage others to do the same. Social media, by some of these businesses, is being used as a means of educating customers and providing information.

That issue of access I think is an important point as well.

Those are just a few of the concerns that I have. I think I've highlighted the main issues that I've heard about in recent days since this bill has come to light. Again, as I said earlier, I'd encourage people to actually look at the legislation that exists in Manitoba. I won't read the entire bill to you or the entire piece of legislation. It started as Bill 30, The Non-Smokers Health Protection Amendment Act and it relates specifically to e-cigarettes. The definitions seem to make a little more sense. The legislation is more specific to vaping.

Just to give you some language from the bill to show that it is more progressive and does distinguish between smoking and vaping. There's an exception here for group living facilities. "The proprietor or board of a group living facility, other than a facility operated exclusively for children, may subject to subsection (2), designate a separate room in the facility as (a) a smoking room; (b) an e-cigarette use room; or (c) a combined smoking and e-cigarette use room." So it clearly acknowledges that forcing e-cigarette users all into smoking rooms might not be the right approach.

I'm not going to read the entire legislation to you, but let me just give you some other examples. There's an exception here for vapour product shops. "The proprietor of a vapour product shop and his or her employees and customers may use e-cigarettes in a vapour product shop to test or sample a product for the purpose of sale of the product for use elsewhere, but only if the shop is fully enclosed by floor-to-ceiling walls, a ceiling and doors that separate it physically from any adjacent area in which the use of e-cigarettes is prohibited."

So that makes a lot of sense, but what we're doing in Bill 35, with the changes to our *Smoke-Free Environment Act* and the *Tobacco Control Act* is preventing that kind of common sense approach from occurring. It's happening today. Like another Member who spoke today, I have visited one of these shops to see first-hand what's going on. I think this approach by Manitoba makes really good sense.

Here's another clause from the Manitoba legislation. "The proprietor of a place where smoking or e-cigarette use is permitted under this Act or the regulations must take reasonable steps to minimize the drifting of smoke or vapour, as the case may be, into areas of the premises where smoking or e-cigarette use is prohibited." So that makes good sense.

There's a clause on prohibiting supplying vapour product to a child, which I just spoke about. I think that's a good addition in Bill 35. "No person shall supply or offer to supply a vapour product to a child."

In fact, I've talked to vapour shop owners who don't allow people under the age of 19 into their stores today, and this legislation will allow that. So they're saying that's not a sensible approach. They're saying we should go further than this legislation proposes. We shouldn't let children into these stores, because if you're allowed to test the products in the stores, which this legislation, as proposed, doesn't allow, but if we do make that change and you are allowed, then we don't want to expose minors to vaping, and we don't want to do anything that could possibly encourage young people to take up smoking or vaping.

I think those involved in the business community here in this sector seem to be taking a reasonable, balanced approach, and one that's supportive of a degree of regulation that makes sense.

There's also language in the Manitoba legislation about product and price lists. So this addresses the concerns around advertising. It highlights that you need to allow some amount of signage and some amount of information to be shared. I would encourage people to have a look at the Manitoba legislation.

We're going to soon, I suspect, go into Committee stage where we'll debate the various clauses of Bill 35, but it's not too late to get this right. Previous speakers have highlighted why not create the opportunity for people to have more input. The vaping community has not had an opportunity to have input. Those running businesses that are involved in vaping have not had an opportunity to have input, and they're not taking an extreme obstructionist kind of

approach. They are putting forward some logical suggestions on how to make this legislation better.

All we have to do is look to the Province of Manitoba and we'll see that some jurisdictions in this country have taken a more reasonable approach to dealing with all of these issues. So I would encourage that. I would encourage government to slow down. We don't need to rush through the Committee stage tonight. We don't need to finish debate on this tonight.

There will be time for even government to prepare the appropriate amendments and bring them in, in the Committee stage. We'd be happy to work with them on that because we're talking about several changes that are probably relatively minor in the grand scheme of things that would make this bill a success story for everyone. That's not to say that everyone will be happy at the end of the day. I doubt the owner of the hookah lounge downtown who is having their business taken away from them is very happy with this legislation, despite the offer by government to try and assist with that transition.

There are lots of things in Bill 35 that are necessary changes that we need to move forward with. Let's try and address these concerns that are coming from the vaping community, and let's look to other jurisdictions, like Manitoba, to try and make this legislation even better.

The way the legislation is written, it would be difficult to introduce all of the specific amendments this evening to address all of these concerns, but we'll still try and raise the issues and we'll urge government to pause. Even if you are not going to establish the committee as we're suggesting and do the consultations, at least pause, gather the input from the community and try and make the minor adjustments to the bill that would allow this to move forward without opposition from us and opposition from stakeholders out there in the community.

I see my time is up, Madam Speaker. I look forward to the Committee stage of the debate.

Thank you.

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

MR. HAGGIE: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's a pleasure to stand today to speak in support of this bill. Having spent several decades before my career change last December as a physician, preventing and reducing smoking and its damage is an issue that I've spent a lot of time on. I've seen first-hand the damage that smoking has caused, both to people's health and their overall quality of life.

The key objectives in this amendment to these pieces of legislation are firstly, to prevent the uptake of smoking by children and youth; secondly, to prevent exposure to harm from second-hand smoke and the potential harm from second-hand vapour; and finally, thirdly, overall to reduce the prevalence of smoking. I believe these amendments to our legislation are the appropriate next steps in an effort to improve the health of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

These issues have been a priority in many other provinces in Canada. Our proposed legislative changes, despite what's been referenced earlier on, are actually very consistent with what's going on elsewhere. Combined with our existing regulatory environment for tobacco products, these measures will result in improvements to our health and, over the long term, reduce the costs of providing health care.

We're all aware of the harmful effects of smoking – such as coughing.

AN HON. MEMBER: Are you still a doctor on call?

MR. HAGGIE: Not anymore.

Smoking increases our risk of cancer, heart and lung disease amongst other ailments. Non-tobacco products can still produce tars and chemicals which over time can lead to the development of cancer as well as lung disease.

If we want to have a smoke-free society we really have to stop people from smoking in the first place. This, of course, is critically important for our children and youth. Flavours such as menthol, mint, candy or fruit added to tobacco products makes them less harsh and more attractive to younger people. They're often packaged in brightly coloured, scented

packaging. Again, appealing to young people and increasing the possibility that they'll experiment with the product. For these reasons, we're concerned about them serving as a gateway to tobacco addiction for youth.

Research has shown that menthol cigarette smoking is how many young people are introduced to smoking and that menthol cigarette smokers find it much harder to quit. In Newfoundland and Labrador, just over 4 per cent of adults use menthol; however, according to the 2013 Youth Smoking Survey, youth tobacco users, grades nine to 12, 53 per cent of them have used flavoured tobacco in the previous 30 days, and 36 per cent of them had smoked menthol cigarettes in the same period.

E-cigarettes hold the potential to introduce a smoking culture to young people who wrongly assume that there are no negative effects. Vaping e-cigarettes look a lot like smoking and, again, serve to normalize this. I would argue that vaping is just a (inaudible). What you're actually doing is not inhaling vapour, you're inhaling an aerosol and I'll come to that in a moment.

We have tried over the years to reverse this normalizing effect, this cultural acceptance of smoking. That is what took six decades to turn that wheel around, turn the ship around, if you like, from the previous culture with – if you like combustion cigarettes, conventional cigarettes.

There is no regulation and no substantive research about the long-term health effects of vapour products. We are starting however, to get research that gives us a clue as to what might be in these aerosols. It is not a vapour, that's a misnomer. An aerosol is a mixture of gas, liquid and solids.

A California Health Officer issued a report late in 2015 identifying at least 10 substances within this aerosol. A list of some of these is lead, nickel, acetaldehyde and formaldehyde. This is what you're inhaling in this aerosol either directly or second hand. Just as an aside, formaldehyde and acetaldehyde, when I was a young fellow, were actually part of the constituents of embalming fluid. So that's what you're putting in your lungs. It hasn't preserved good health; I don't think it's going to either.

Having said that, the argument opposite that this has some therapeutic use in terms of transitioning hard-core cigarette smokers off the weed, as it were, and back to non-nicotine products and then hopefully cessation all together is not a door we're closing. There is no evidence one way or another, but it's not a door we're closing.

There is also some evidence, antidotal reports are coming out about an association between vaping and pneumonias of unusual natures. Again, right at the beginning of cigarette smoking, as the member opposite pointed out, there were people in reputable professions who were promoting this as a healthy activity. We've seen the same kind of slant in the Opposition's discussion of vaping, that somehow this is less unhealthy than smoking, when in actual fact there really isn't an awful lot of evidence to support that. It hasn't been around a lot.

What you hear repeated in the quotes from various parliamentary and standing committees are in actual fact marketing from vested interests who want to promote the apparatus and the juice.

Juice sounds such an innocuous title, but really it isn't, because you really are only starting now to find out what's in it once you heat it and turn it into an aerosol, and those are not substances that anybody in their right mind wants to put anywhere near their body directly or have others, who have the choice, should not have to have the choice as to whether or not they are in a public place because of exposure to this, and certainly the issue of minors is well dealt with in the new legislation.

So to go back to this transition approach, we're certainly in this legislation not prohibiting e-cigarette products at all, but we're going to regulate them in exactly the same way as we regulate tobacco. That will help minimize their accessibility to children and youth.

In 2014, the World Health Organization's report, *Electronic nicotine delivery systems*, or ENDS, states that whilst e-cigarettes represent an evolving frontier, filled with promise and threat for tobacco control, additional research is needed on multiple areas of e-cigarette use that regulations are required to address health

concerns. We're not waiting 60 years for the problem to appear; we're actually acting proactively as a public health measure.

The report concluded among several of the recommendations that regulations were required – this was from 2014 – in the areas of advertising and promotion, the use of e-cigarettes in public place, and sale to minors – exactly those areas referenced in this legislation.

To move on to the issue of hookah smoking, our actions are also consistent with legislation in a number of other Canadian provinces and municipalities – Toronto and Vancouver have been mentioned, and they're supported by recommendations from other leading sources around the world.

Hookah is really simply another form of smoking. Many users feel that it's somehow less harmful than cigarette smoking because the smoke passes through water in a hookah pipe. All that water does is it doesn't filter it out, any of the chemicals, it simply cools it down, moisturizes it, and makes it far less irritating to your air passages, and therefore much more tolerable to new users. It hooks them on the hookah.

Studies show that smoke from both tobacco and non-tobacco preparations contains carbon monoxide. In actual fact, from clinical experience, carbon monoxide is probably more associated with cardiovascular and lung disease than nicotine – and that should never be underestimated. It's a product of combustion.

Other toxic agents are also in this soup. Identifying the constituents of cigarette smoke has taken 40 years and the list, the last time I looked, was 3,000 items long. To do research on each of those, while it may be necessary, is really dealing with the issue of a stable door and a bolted horse.

The toxic agents within these non-tobacco and tobacco-containing shisha products, we know already, increase the risk of smoking-related cancers, heart disease and lung disease. Second-hand tobacco smoke from hookahs is exactly the same as second-hand tobacco smoke or shisha smoke from any other source.

The Centers for Disease Control in the United States has reported that on average a typical hookah smoking session lasting an hour involves 200 puffs compared to about 20 for a conventional cigarette. The volume of smoke that you inhale from a hookah is about on average 90 litres compared with 500 to 600 millilitres inhaled when smoking a cigarette. The average human being has a tidal volume, the air they move each breath, of around 450 millilitres. Ninety litres is a hell of a lot of breathing.

A 2013 study out of the University of Alberta published in the journal *Tobacco Control* found that smoke emissions of herbal shisha a water pipe user would inhale contains substantial amounts of toxins which were equal to or greater than those from tobacco-based shisha. The study also looked at the constituents of second-hand smoke which was produced from burning either the herbal or the tobacco versions of shisha in a water pipe.

The analysis showed the ultra-fine particle levels were similar. Those are those fine little bits that stick in your lungs. If you ever have the opportunity to go into an operating room and look at someone whose lungs have been exposed from those of a smoker, they are the colour of this jacket. Normal healthy lungs are a real nice pink, something along the lines of the tie that the Member for Mount Pearl North was admiring at the sessions at lunchtime. Similar to his shade in the middle of his stripe as well, nice pink healthy lungs. That's what the particles do. They turn your lung into a gritty sponge.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. HAGGIE: Yes. The other existing thing was that they found a slight increase in a substance called benzopyrene in herbal shisha. That is something that when it gets on your skin, in actual fact, will produce skin cancer.

So we believe the time has come to ban the smoking of all shisha products from indoor public places and workplaces. The amendments we're debating here today to these two pieces of legislation are not just in line with other municipalities and with other provinces and jurisdictions, they're actually evidence based, therein keeping with research and recommendations from recognized sources in

Canada and around the world. There's the 2013 Canadian Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs Survey, there's the World Health Organization, there's reports from the US CDC among others.

I'm interested in hearing what others do have to say about these amendments during our debate and when we get to the Committee stage, but I believe that all Members of this House understand the real dangers of smoking. We must continue to look at improving our legislation and regulations to make sure they keep up with new products that come on the market. Trying to find a gap between vaping and smoking is artificial. It really is. Flavoured products and hookah products are actually no different anyway, than conventional tobacco smoking.

Above all, we again must try to ensure that our children and youth do not have the opportunity to take up smoking or vaping in the first place. So I believe the amendments that we're debating here today will help accomplish this.

I hope that all Members in this House will support this legislation. I don't propose to speak any longer; I've made the points I want to.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER (Dempster): Order, please!

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

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

I'm very happy once again to stand and speak to Bill 35. I was very happy to be able to speak and give somewhat of a thumbnail sketch of really what the tobacco industry has done, particularly in North America and a few other places in the world in terms of expanding their reach and growing their clientele for smoking for tobacco products, and also to reiterate once again how little we knew about the harmful health issues of smoking.

So many of us know about that and so many of us have even experienced it in our own lives or in our families or our parents who are a little bit older where it was – the goal of the tobacco industry was to totally saturate the market. They basically saturated the market for men and then they had a very targeted campaign to get women to smoke.

It's very interesting how they targeted women: "Reach for a Lucky Instead of a Sweet." So they made a correlation between slimness and smoking. They also made a pitch to get women who were working in the home who were sort of the traditional housewives: To help your nerves, grab a cigarette. They used words such as: Make your disposition sweeter, or calm your nerves.

Also, they recommended it for pregnant women to calm their nerves during their pregnancy, or if you had a crying baby. All of this, they knew exactly what they were doing. The tobacco industry knew exactly what they were doing. This was a multi-million dollar industry, or a multi-billion dollar industry and their outreach was very targeted, was very deliberate, was very specific.

I believe there is some correlation between vaping and the tobacco industry. Again, it's about that inhaling – but I want to speak as well, I do understand some of the components of the harm reduction, but on the flipside of that, what we are looking at in this regulation is not prohibiting vaping but because vaping is also about that experience of inhaling a substance, exhaling that substance, normalizing smoking, it's sort of like, okay, if I can't smoke tobacco, if I can't smoke that cigarette, maybe I can do the vaping. Maybe that's going to be less harmful.

The fact is when we look at the history of tobacco smoking, cigarette smoking, cigar smoking, pipe smoking – we haven't even talked about pipe smoking and the effects that had on public health – we also have to use a precautionary principle. Extensive research has not been done around the potential harmful issues around vaping.

Now, I had a family member who was a smoker and who had a heart problem. So what she did is she started vaping and eventually she ended up – a young woman – in the hospital, had never had

pneumonia before, but ended up in the hospital for six weeks with pneumonia. She was a voracious ‘vaper’.

What you see is when people are vaping – because you don’t get the same nicotine hit that you would get with cigarettes and because there is this mythology that it’s harmless compared to tobacco and cigarettes, people may vape more often than they do a cigarette. You just kind of drag it right into your lungs to try and get that hit because you don’t really get the same kind of hit.

So we did a lot of research. She ended up in the hospital for six weeks with pneumonia, and a very specific type of pneumonia. We did a lot of research online. If people do research online they can see where there are links that are to the point of almost causal, the number of people who can get this particular type of pneumonia from vaping.

What it is, as well, is there’s an oily substance within your vaping instrument where bacteria can collect. Then, also people may not handle their vapour in a very sanitized way, so bacteria can grow within your instrument. So you are taking that directly into your lungs.

There’s also been some research on some of the vaping instruments that come from certain parts of the world. Again, the regulation around safety – we are really concerned, for instance, around the production of food. We have very specific regulations about the production of food to ensure there aren’t bacteria in our food, listeria in our food, but we don’t quite have that around vaping. It hasn’t been regulated enough.

What we’re seeing is that certain vaping instruments coming from certain parts of the world, in fact those bacteria are already in there. So people are breathing that and dragging it right down into their lungs. There are concerns about that.

Now, my particular family member who was in the hospital – young woman again – for six weeks, her doctor believes the vaping was related. We did a lot of research online, and I invite people here to do the same. She almost died. Then, after six weeks in hospital – and I know this is anecdotal, but as the Minister of

Health and Community Services has stated, there is some very interesting research looking at the issue of the potential for pneumonia from these vaping instruments. I’m not totally against vaping, but I do believe that putting regulations and restrictions in place similar to cigarettes is not a bad thing.

There’s a thing in health, particularly in the environmental area and in the health area, called the precautionary principle. So we don’t yet know for sure, but from the research that has been done to date from some anecdotal evidence, and also by making extrapolations from what we do know about health, from what we do know about science, that it’s reasonable to think there is a problem, although more research has to be done. So then what is applied is the precautionary measure, the precautionary principle. I believe that’s what we have to do in the area of vaping.

People are free to vape, but to have it regulated in the same way that cigarette smoking is regulated, I believe is the responsible thing to do. In fact, what we’re doing because there’s not enough research to do absolutely evidence-based pronouncements, we can use the precautionary principle around this issue.

The harm reduction; harm reduction is about helping people who have substance abuse issues, who have addictions, to do – okay, what is the best way to help folks so that they can live with the addiction they have and that they avail of whatever programs we have available to help them live as safely as possible with their addictions issue.

Some doctors have recommended to their patients, try vaping instead of cigarette smoking because we know for sure what the issues are on cigarette smoking. As the Minister of Health and Community Services has said – and I use this word as well – there’s a chemical soup that is tied up with cigarettes like the number of chemicals in the paper itself.

I had a friend who was a chemist. She worked with a tobacco company in Montreal for over 30 years. The work she did was only around the papers used in cigarettes. So it’s about the slow burn, it’s about the taste and it’s about the efficacy of the papers. There was a real science

to that, but the number of chemicals that are just used in the paper itself.

That kind of work hasn't been done around vaping. I believe that we can look at the precautionary principle in terms of the potential health effects and do regulation around vaping in that same vein. I also believe that because we don't have absolute science that shows absolute causation, there needs to be more research in this area. We can look at vaping as a potential harm reduction.

Let's remember, harm reduction isn't about let's make something that is not as harmful, so for when people start. Harm reduction is to be able to work with and help folks who are already dealing with substance abuse, with an addiction. It's not about is this a better thing to start with or not. Of course the concern is the normalization of smoking.

We still are dealing with – when we see the number, particularly of young women who start to smoke, because again there is this mythology about correlating smoking with slimness and being able to keep your weight down. So you smoke instead of eating a sweet or grabbing a sweet.

The other thing is the mythology of people who believe that smoking will calm their nerves. Really what happens is when you smoke a cigarette – and I believe that's what's going to be happening with vaping as well: It calms me nerves.

Well, in fact, what happens with cigarettes is that when you smoke a cigarette, you get your hit of nicotine. Each time you finish your cigarette, then the nicotine levels in your body drop. So, in fact, what you're doing is your going through a period of withdrawal. Then the reason smoking seems to calm your nerves is not so much that smoking is calming your nerves, but having a cigarette then gets that nicotine into your system again. So, in fact, what you're dealing with is not calming your nerves. You're dealing with the process of withdrawal from nicotine.

So it's kind of funny. In fact, smoking causes this feeling of discomfort and this anxiety because you've developed an addiction to

nicotine. Again, the cigarette is about re-entering and re-establishing the levels of nicotine in your body.

Will vaping calm your nerves? I believe it's that same kind of cycle. Although for the most part, it doesn't always involve nicotine.

I believe that looking at this particular issue we use the precautionary principle. There is some evidence there to show about very specific types of pneumonia that can be linked to vaping. Again, (a) because some of the vaping instruments are not clean and have bacteria, then also the way people use this.

I want to see regulation around vaping. I've received a number of emails from people, some of them in my own district who've said, I voted for you but I'm really concerned about Bill 35. When I look at Bill 35, anybody who wants to vape, 19 and over, they can go to an establishment that sells the equipment. They can vape in the privacy of their own home or in other private spaces. I believe their rights are not being limited at all. In fact, this falls in line with how we deal with any other kind of tobacco product, although this is not a tobacco product, but the whole issue of inhaling smoke in whatever form.

The other thing is when we go to our places of work, we can see all over the place signs that say this is a scent-sensitive area or there are people that are sensitive to different scents who have allergies, but the signs basically are saying, all over the place, this is a scent-free area. Vaping, even though somebody may decide to have a different flavour in their vaping and there is a whole plethora of flavours that you can have – but again, we've made so much progress in the whole area of scent-free environments.

So if I'm in a restaurant or a bar, I don't want to be smelling bubble-gum vape. How does that go down with your Black Horse? I don't know; I don't want to be smelling –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. ROGERS: I don't want to be smelling bubble-gum vape smoke when I'm having my Black Horse or my YellowBelly Wheat Ale or any of those wonderful things. Or if I'm having

a nice seared scallop at one of our fabulous local restaurants, I don't want to be smelling –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. ROGERS: I don't want to be smelling bubble-gum –

MR. SPEAKER (Warr): Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: – vape, no siree, and I don't think any of us do.

I believe that the regulations that are set forth here, I think that they're fair and, again, it allows people who want to vape and the industry, the vaping industry, to be able to sell their wares. As a matter of fact for vape stores, for shops that are dedicated to vaping and e-cigarettes, they can even have all of their wares displayed as well. They can have all of their flavours as well. They are not inhibited from having flavours.

Now, the thing is some people say, well, that means that you don't have the chance to taste the different flavours. Well, I don't know, the last time I went to a grocery store I wasn't allowed to taste the cookies or taste the flavourings that you use for baking.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MS. ROGERS: If you could taste all the different beer or whatever in the store, my hon. Member across the hallways says.

I understand some of the concerns. I understand the industry wanting to be able to make as much money as they possibly can. I understand all that. There is a whole culture around vaping as well and, again, I have family Members who have been able to quit smoking. Quitting smoking is really tough; I know that. Most of us have been there; most of us in this House have been there. I understand there are some who haven't. They are the lucky ones. They are very, very lucky ones, but I understand how hard it is to quit smoking.

For those who want to use it as a harm-reduction issue, I understand that. For those who want to use it as one step towards quitting smoking, I understand that, but let's not be fooled. We know that there are some dangers associated

with vaping because, again, what you're dealing with is another chemical soup. The health benefits have not been proved, but again, I understand the harm reduction.

We don't want our kids vaping. We don't want our young people vaping. We don't want them saying, well, vaping is not as bad as cigarettes, so I'm going to vape. So I believe the regulations around vaping –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: – are responsible. I believe, in fact, that this is a proactive measure by government. I can totally support that. For the folks in my district who are really concerned about what it means for them, I understand; but again, I'd like to refer us back to the whole history that I did when I spoke earlier about the tobacco lobby, about the industry lobby, about the very targeted, very, very targeted messages to saturate because it's an industry to get as many potential clients as possible.

We do have really strong food regulations. We have a lot of regulations about what comes into our bodies around food. I want to see strong regulations about what we take in our bodies in all kinds of ways. It's about water. It's about meat, fruit and vegetables, about our agricultural industry as well.

I believe that indigenous people, when they use tobacco in ceremonies, when they use a peace pipe in ceremonies, that those rights are protected. I believe that is really important. I want to see us beef up our smoking cessation programs. It's not enough just to have a phone line. I want to see smoking incorporated into all of our addiction programs. There are so many people out there who are smoking who don't want to smoke. They really don't want to smoke but who don't know how to quit.

The thing is none of us were born smokers. Again, it was so hard to smoke, to start smoking and it was so normalized and it was such an acceptable thing to do. Now there are many people who are so hooked on tobacco and nicotine, I get it, I know how hard that is and I want to see more money poured into programs

that will actually help people who want to quit to quit. It takes a lot to quit. We had to learn how to smoke and then we had to learn how to quit.

So I believe that it's an absolute shame that government did not choose to use every democratic tool at our disposal and did not take this to committee first, because we would have been able to work out some of the issues that are raised by the Official Opposition party. I rely on some of the great work that's been done in Manitoba, in Quebec, in New Brunswick, in Nova Scotia. The world hasn't fallen apart because of the way they are regulating e-cigarettes and the whole industry.

Mr. Speaker, I will now take my seat.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member her time has expired.

MS. ROGERS: Thank you very much.

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm not going to take a long time here, but I do want to reiterate a couple of points now that we're speaking to the main motion. Again, as I said last time when I spoke to the amendment, I agreed with the amendment. Unfortunately, it was voted down, as I predicted, but I will be supporting Bill 35. I think it's important to say that.

I just heard the hon. Member for St. John's Centre talk about she doesn't want to go out to a restaurant and taste bubble-gum flavoured vape smoke and all this. I don't either. I don't think anybody on this side is saying they want to. I don't vape, I don't smoke. I used to smoke years ago. I have nobody in my family who smokes or vapes, not a soul. So there's nothing in this for me to raise any of these issues, not a thing.

I know the majority of people are against smoking, and I'd say the majority of the population are probably against vaping. They're certainly against being exposed to somebody else's vaping. I'm against it. If someone comes over to my house and if they had a vape, they'd

have to go out on the patio the same as someone with a cigarette, the same thing. So there's no argument, not one bit of argument in that regard at all.

The only issue that's been raised, certainly with me, and I know others have raised it – now, the Member for Mount Pearl North raised some issues about being able to advertise on the Internet and all that stuff. That concern wasn't raised to me, so I can't speak to it. He has, and that's good.

The big one that I've heard from people with vaping shops is they agree with all the legislation. They agree with the fact that you shouldn't be able to go to a restaurant and vape. You shouldn't vape in your car with a youngster. There shouldn't be people under 19 years old vaping. You shouldn't be able to go to Marie's Mini Mart and test the vaping while there are people going in there to pick up a loaf of bread and be exposed to it. They agree with all that.

The only part they're saying is when you go into a vape shop – and that's the sole purpose, is the vape shop. Nobody else has any reason to be in there. That when people go in there they need to – they're going in there because they're smokers and they want to stop smoking. They want to use this as an alternative, which I think admittedly, whether it's 95 per cent or 90 per cent or 50 per cent, it's less harmful than cigarettes.

They want to wean themselves off tobacco, off nicotine, which is what this is meant to do. If they want to go in there so that someone can show them how to use the device properly, so that they can test the different flavour of juices or whatever you call it, and there's nobody else in there only people who are going there for that purpose, than what's the harm? That's the only issue. What's the harm in doing that?

That's the concern they are raising. As a government, as society, what is the goal here? What is the goal of this legislation? The goal of this legislation is to prevent harm to the public. I would argue that if this testing is not being done in public – it may be in public by definition, that definition could easily be amended, but if it's not harming the public, then there's no harm there.

If somebody is going there so they can get off the cigarettes, and this helps them get off the cigarettes, sure that's a good thing. The purpose of the legislation is to protect the public and it is also to prevent health care costs that we are all going to have to pay for. So if somebody gets off cigarettes, they don't get lung cancer and all the costs associated with that, sure that's a good thing isn't it? I would see that as a good thing.

That's the only point. That's really the only point. Certainly, that is the salient point that has been communicated to me. I don't understand why we would be against looking at that. Why would we be against exploring that? I don't understand.

That doesn't mean we're promoting vaping as the new thing, because kids can't buy it. You can't go buy it at a retail store. Kids can't buy it. We are not advertising it. It's not going to be on signs outside the thing, try vaping and all that; none of that. It is simply a place for a smoker to go to get off the smokes. It's as simple as that. A minor amendment in that regard could work for everybody. So that is the main point.

Mr. Speaker, before I sit down, I do have a couple of emails that were sent to me and I want to just put it into the record as well. My colleague from Mount Pearl North read the one from Mr. Wilkins, so I won't read that again, but he sent that to all Members. I did have three sent to me.

The first one, I'm not going to use his name because I don't know if he wants me to use his name. His first name is Steve, but I won't use his last name to identify him. It's not Steve Crocker either.

AN HON. MEMBER: Steve Kent?

MR. LANE: Not Steve Kent either.

Oops, I apologize, Mr. Speaker, I can't use names. Forgive me. That was a mistake.

Anyway, his name was Steve. He said: I'm writing you today with my concerns about Bill 35. If Bill 35 is passed we will no longer be able to try e-juice before we buy it. The e-juice that we can sample contains no nicotine.

That's an important point too. When they're doing the testing of the e-juice to get the flavour, there's no nicotine. You can get the e-juice with nicotine. When you go on these e-cigarettes you start off – if you're a heavy smoker you start off with a high amount of nicotine. Eventually, you wean down the amount of nicotine, hopefully to zero at some point. When you're actually testing the flavours, of which all they're saying here, there's zero nicotine – zero, none, nada, not a thing.

New people will no longer be shown how to use their new device and learn the safety of it right there in the store. That's the other point. Part of it is if you're trying to use this for the first time, somebody shows you how to actually use the device and use it safely. To me that would be an important point.

Vaping is helping a lot of people quit smoking. People have smoked for tens of years, and get healthier by no longer inhaling the millions of chemicals that's produced from tobacco consumption. I, for one and many people I know can now breathe better, run or do activities without getting short of breath. E-juice has nothing to do with tobacco. The nicotine used in e-juice does not come from the tobacco plant – now, I don't know if that's true. I'm only reading what he has here. That may or may not be accurate, but that's what he's saying.

There are many plants and vegetables that contain nicotine. Maybe the Minister of Health would know this being a doctor. He says: Many vegetables contain nicotine like tomatoes, potatoes, eggplants used in juice, peppers, cauliflower, plus more. I don't know if that's right or not. He's saying it is.

The same ingredients that are in e-juice are the same that are being put into our food. Every ingredient is food grade. I have smoked for 12 years and quit instantly when I started vaping. The shops are doing a great job and not selling to minors, persons under 19. There is no need for this bill. Can you please do some research about vaping and show how much safer this is. That was one person's perspective.

The next one I have here is a gentleman by the name of Andrew. It's not the same Andrew

because I have the other Andrew here that the member read. This is a different Andrew.

Hello, my name is Andrew. I want to tell you what I think about Bill 35. I'm a 15-year smoker. I started when I was 15 years old – so he's 30 now – which quit thanks to vaping. Vaping was a lifesaver from staying away from smoking. If I was not vaping, I would be smoking which I don't want. Vape is cheaper and 95 per cent healthier. In Europe, they are allowing vaping in hospitals – that shows how safe it is. Now, this is what he is saying. I don't know if that's true, but he is saying in Europe you can actually vape in hospitals. The glycol is the same they put in air in hospitals.

If they pass Bill 35, it definitely shows how uneducated our government has gotten about world issues and how they make it that tobacco companies will win and get more money. I wish it hadn't gotten like that. The only thing they should pass is it should be 19 and up at all stores, as they are doing already, and the only reason younger teens are getting it is the same as they do with tobacco. I hope you read this and turn down Bill 35.

The final one I have – this is from the owner of a vape shop. This gentleman who owns a vape shop says: Numerous studies have surfaced in the last few months that have proven that exhaled vapour in the air is no more harmful than the air we breathe that contains no vapour. The last thing the vapour community wants is to renormalize smoking. In fact, it has been my belief that we are more anti-smoking than people who have never smoked.

Then under his summary of Bill 35 and the amendments, he says: Section 4.2 and 4.3 discuss the displaying of products, sampling of products and keeping merchandise from the public view. It does not state in – actually, Mr. Speaker, what I'm going to do is I'm going to wait until I get to Committee of the Whole because these would be questions. I'll skip that part.

The only points of contention are the dedicated vape shops must be allowed to operate as we currently have been. A customer needs to be able to view the products, touch the products and sample the products in order to make a decision

that will be a health benefit to them. We are not claiming that vaping is 100 per cent safe. We are not doctors or scientists, but no one can argue against the studies that state vaping is at least 95 per cent safer than traditional cigarettes.

A report by the Royal College of Physicians in England, the same group that claimed cigarettes were linked to cancer, this group claims the same results in a 200-page report. As for vaping being some backdoor into leading people to smoke, that seems like the strangest thing we've heard as an industry.

Of the thousands of customers myself and my staff have pushed through the doors, I have never met someone who entered the store as a non-smoker looking to blow clouds. Every single customer is either a smoker or somebody looking at quitting traditional cigarettes. I'm a little caught off guard this morning with this news briefing today, but I will send you more info that I may have forgotten. Thanks again for your attention.

So this is from a vape shop owner. Again, the point here, Mr. Speaker, is that nobody is against the legislation around tobacco. Nobody is against that. Nobody is against not allowing the flavoured tobacco, the kids, the advertising and the methanol cigarettes – not methanol, the menthol cigarettes. What they are trying to do there is cut all of that out.

Nobody is against that and nobody is suggesting that you should be allowed to go vaping in a public area, or vaping around kids, or kids should be able to do it. Nobody is saying any of that. All they are saying is someone trying to get off the smokes, they go into the vape shop and they are able to test it, taste it, whatever, shown how to use the thing so that they can get off the cigarettes which will be better for their health, and will help cut down the expenses on the health care system. That's all they're asking for, a simple amendment.

With that said, Mr. Speaker, I'll take my seat and I'm hoping, beyond hope, that maybe all of this debate will spark a change of heart and maybe we'll see some amendments.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: If the hon. the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services speaks now, she will close the debate.

The hon. the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Speaker, the previous administration worked on Bill 35 and did some comprehensive work leading up to this day, and I thank them for their work. This bill was not rushed, Mr. Speaker, as the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune said earlier.

For the Opposition briefing, one staff member from each party showed up and the MHA for Mount Pearl – Southlands was also briefed.

AN HON. MEMBER: He was not invited.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: He was briefed.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Health Canada issued an advisory in 2009 advising Canadians to not use these cigarettes because safety and quality was unknown. Mr. Speaker, on May 19, 2015 the MHA for Topsail – Paradise said government is keeping the health of this province's population as a priority, as are we, Mr. Speaker.

Regarding consultation, input to inform the proposed tobacco control amendment was obtained through a jurisdictional scan of other PT legislation, meetings and review of evidence, correspondence, physician statements and media coverage. Additional information is that meetings were held with the following stakeholders and groups to provide the opportunity for these groups and individuals to share their position on the issue: the Newfoundland and Labrador Alliance for the Control of Tobacco, the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils, the owner of Aladdin's Hookah Lounge, the Atlantic Convenience Stores Association and the Canadian Vaping Association.

The Department of Health and Community Services ministerial Cancer Control Advisory

Committee submitted recommendations. The Atlantic Convenience Stores Association and the Canadian Vaping Association supports amendments related to age restrictions to minors regarding the sale of e-cigarettes.

Local vapour shops have publicly stated that they support some industry regulation and that they currently have policies in place to not sell to minors.

Mr. Speaker, with regard to legalizing marijuana, there is much left to discuss. The federal government is considering developing legislation to legalize marijuana. The legislation and any implications it may have on provinces and territories from a number of perspectives will be discussed between the provincial and federal government.

Government's view is that the public health benefits of this legislation is very important to the health of the residents of our province and, in particular, our youth. Tobacco companies Imperial Tobacco and JTI-Macdonald have filed lawsuits in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec and Alberta against legislative measures to ban the sale of flavoured tobacco; therefore, there is a risk of a similar legal challenge being brought by tobacco companies against a ban on a sale of menthol tobacco products in our province as well.

We have sought legal advice from Justice and Public Safety in the development of these amendments and we are confident in the amendments and are prepared to defend them if challenged, Mr. Speaker.

We recognize that there may be benefits to e-cigarettes. We are regulating, not banning e-cigarettes. The sale of e-cigarettes will be limited to people age 19 and older, as with tobacco products.

The Member for Mount Pearl North read an email that many of us received from Andrew. Andrew can continue vaping if he is 19 years or older. Mr. Speaker, employees in vape shops should not be forced to be exposed to second-hand vapour all day in a public place.

The Member for Mount Pearl North spoke about social media and advertising. The only thing we

are regulating is point-of-sale advertising at the retail level. We are not – and I repeat, not – regulating promotions from Internet, email, social media, TV, radio, et cetera.

E-cigarettes do not emit a harmless water vapour but an aerosol that has been found to contain at least 10 toxic chemicals such as formaldehyde, lead and nickel. The aerosol contains high concentrations of ultra-fine particles that are inhaled and become trapped in the lungs.

The bill has allowed for designated e-cigarette rooms in long-term care homes and remote work sites, underground mines and offshore platforms. We are amending the *Smoke-Free Environment Act, 2005* and the *Tobacco Control Act* to further protect the public, in particular, Mr. Speaker, children and youth, from the harms of flavoured tobacco products including menthol and hookah smoking and the potential harms of electronic cigarettes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

The motion is that Bill 35 be now read a second time.

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

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: All those against, ‘nay.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

MR. SPEAKER: Carried.

CLERK (Murphy): A bill, An Act To Amend The Smoke-Free Environment Act, 2005 And The Tobacco Control Act. (Bill 35)

MR. SPEAKER: This bill has now been read a second time. When shall the bill be referred to a Committee of the Whole?

MS. COADY: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill, “An Act To Amend The Smoke-Free Environment Act, 2005 And The Tobacco Control Act,” read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 35)

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

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 35, An Act To Amend The Smoke-Free Environment Act, 2005 And The Tobacco Control Act.

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

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

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: All those against, ‘nay.’

Carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Dempster): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 35, An Act To Amend The Smoke-Free Environment Act, 2005 And The Tobacco Control Act.

A bill, “An Act To Amend The Smoke-Free Environment Act, 2005 And The Tobacco Control Act.” (Bill 35)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. KENT: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm glad to see Members of government are taking this debate seriously.

We have raised many concerns in second reading debate this afternoon. Now in committee we have an opportunity to raise some issues specific to the different clauses of the bill.

There have been concerns pouring in from people in the province who feel there are problems with parts of this legislation. Overall, there are lots of things in this legislation that make sense, but there are some specific things that are problematic that we've highlighted today. I just want to share with you some comments that I received late today since this debate has been taking place.

Regardless of the safety, long-term effects of vaping, I don't disagree with vaping and e-cigarette usage being banned in public places and the workplace. If you smoke you would need to go to designated areas, but also there are scented products and have chemicals that could affect other people. Personally, I don't mind it but I know people with allergies to scents and it could be an irritation for those people at the least. Yes, it helps a lot of smokers quit and that is good, but there should be regulations in place for it – and we agree, there should be sensible regulations in place for it. The flavouring that's used in some of the cigarette products is actually food grade flavouring. So there are many people in the vaping community who would suggest that the product is not harmful.

Someone goes on in this discussion to say: I'm not disputing the product; I have friends that use it all the time. When it comes to vaping in public and/or workplace areas, I feel it should respect others and be regulated – again, we agree. I believe there should be age restrictions to be able to purchase and use the product – again we agree, the vaping community agrees. If you are in a store that is exclusively a vapour store, go ahead and sample. People are there for that reason. If they advertise, fine.

I think that's kind of a common sense view of the arguments that we've been trying to make this afternoon during this debate. Should some marketing and promotion be permitted if it's educational and if it's a discussion through social media channels? I would argue yes. Despite the minister's comments in the closing and second reading, I would argue that that should be acceptable.

Should vaping shops be able to demonstrate the use of their product and allow people to sample their products? I think yes. Based on safety concerns alone it makes sense. Should people be able to vape in institutions? Well, that's an interesting point that has come up today that warrants further consideration. So I think these are matters that make sense for government to look at and further consider.

Consumers have a right to information about vapour products. This bill is going to unfairly restrict that information. Vapour products are not tobacco products, and categorizing them the same way is unreasonable and unfair. Regulating promotion as harshly as tobacco is absolutely a safety concern.

So, Madam Chair, I would ask government once again to look at what other jurisdictions like Manitoba are doing. There is a better way forward here. There are simple changes that can be made to this bill that would address the concerns we've raised this afternoon. It's really unfortunate that the minister and government are unwilling to listen.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl –Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have a couple of questions for the minister. So I guess I'll just read them and maybe she can respond to them at once or one at a time. Anyway, hopefully she will respond to them. These are not my questions. These are questions that were given to me by the owner of the shop.

AN HON. MEMBER: A constituent.

MR. LANE: No, not a constituent but the owner of a vape shop.

Section 4.2, 4.3 discuss the displaying of products, sampling of products and keeping merchandise from the public view. It does state in 4.6(2) that 4.2 and 4.3 do not apply to a tobacconist shop or a vapour product shop but we would like to ensure that these amendment stay true and exclude existing businesses that sell only these products, unlike gas stations and convenience stores. That was one question they had, Madam Chair.

Under section 3, the section on a designated room, the commentary here is the wording is vague but seems to be talking about a ship, a vessel or a mine. It states, an employee may designate a room or rooms that could be used for e-cigarette use. We need to know whether or not the entire vape shop can be considered a room since there is no reason anyone who isn't one of the following to be entering the vape shop.

Now, I'm pretty sure the answer to that is going to be no, they can't do it; but, they're saying anyone entering the shop is going to be a current smoker looking for a safer alternative. A vaper looking for a new product. A vaper looking for a staff member to fix an existing problem with the device. What they are saying is under the section that talks about creating a separate room where you can vape, could the vape shop be considered that room? Hence, that's a way they could continue to allow people to test their products in the store.

The other question which was sent, says here: I would love an answer from the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services whether or not the government has referenced the report of April 28, 2016, from the Royal College of Physicians in the UK that states that vaping is at minimum 95 per cent safer than cigarettes. This is the same group that made it publicly known about cancer being linked to cigarettes. Putting regulations on a safer alternative is not only harsh, but affects the overall well-being and health of the community.

The final question which I had here myself for the minister would be: Why did you choose not to consult with the people who own the vape shops here in Newfoundland and Labrador? Why was there no consultation with them seeing as how they're one of the major stakeholders?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Seniors, Wellness and Social Development.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: No, vape shops cannot be a designated e-cigarette room. We are not preventing people from over the age of 19 –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: – from smoking. We did consult with organizations and groups.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands.

MR. LANE: I understand, Madam Chair, that the minister said she's consulted with organizations and groups. I'm asking her specifically why she did not consult with the owners of the vape shops here in Newfoundland.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. KENT: I was just rising to allow the minister to have a chance to answer the question. It looks like she's going to answer the question so I'll sit and let her do so.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Seniors, Wellness and Social Development.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: There wasn't direct consultation done, you're correct. As I said before, input to inform the proposed tobacco control amendments was obtained through a jurisdictional scan.

We followed what was done by other provinces across Canada. The previous administration had a significant amount of work done on this piece of legislation.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Again, I'm not disputing that there was work done. I'm not disputing that there was a jurisdictional scan done. The question is we have vaping shops. That's what they do. They're

here in our province, not somebody else's province, our province. Why would you not consult with those stakeholders?

CHAIR: Seeing no further speakers, shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

CHAIR: Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK (Barnes): Clauses 2 through 20 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 2 to 20 inclusive carry?

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. KENT: Thank you, Madam Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. KENT: Madam Chair, I can't hear myself.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: Madam Chair, a point of order.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs on a point of order.

MR. JOYCE: Madam Chair, by section 49, the hon. – I think it's Mount Pearl – Southlands was singing out shut up. As he asked the Member the other day to apologize, I ask that he apologize and just move on with it. He can't go telling people to shut up. There's chatting here, chatting about this very serious bill.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands.

MR. LANE: I withdraw my remarks.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. KENT: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The points I wanted to raise in the Committee stage on these clauses – it's 2 to what number? Sorry, Madam Chair.

CHAIR: Clauses 2 to 20.

MR. KENT: Clauses 2 to 20. I'm not going to repeat everything that was said this afternoon. At length for 40 minutes this afternoon I went through all of these points and arguments, so I'm not going to repeat it all this evening. There are some questions that do need to be asked at this stage of the debate.

I'm curious why government wasn't willing to create more distinction and separation between vaping and tobacco. It feels like those issues should be dealt with separately. I'm looking, for instance, at clause 5 at the moment. I think that challenge could be addressed through a legislation review committee.

I guess my first question to the minister is – and I'll allow her to respond – why are you so opposed to allowing for the public to have input? You did the jurisdictional scan, you've talked to the hookah lounge downtown, but the vape shops haven't been consulted. The thousands of people in this province that use vaping as a form of harm reduction haven't been consulted.

Minister, why are you so opposed to allowing the public to have input? I'd like to hear the minister answer that question, Madam Chair.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Seniors, Wellness and Social Development.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: We're not opposed. Local vapour shops had publicly stated that they support some industry regulation and that they currently have policies in place to not sell to minors. So they've had input in this legislation.

AN HON. MEMBER: As the Member opposite knows.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Yes, as the Member opposite would know. As the previous minister of Health and Community Services, there was a significant amount of work done on this bill prior.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. KENT: They weren't consulted, Madam Chair.

In the response the minister gave to the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands she made it clear that they weren't consulted. They weren't consulted when I was the Minister of Health and Community Services, at least not by the department that I was working for. When I left office, there was still further work to be done on this legislation by Seniors, Wellness and Social Development.

There are stakeholders in the community that are very concerned about what government is doing here and, unfortunately, this could be a good news story for the government. There are lots of things in this bill that we can all get excited about and agree upon. It's unfortunate that because the minister is not willing to press pause on the issues that people are upset about at this stage, that they won't have an opportunity to have input. It just doesn't make any sense.

I'll jump to clause 7. One of the concerns I have, which I raised earlier but it's important enough to highlight again, relates to the definition of e-cigarette. The way it's laid out, there are thousands of products in that category so it shows the disregard for the vaping industry and for the vaping community. I don't know why the minister would be unwilling to consider making changes that would address these concerns. Further down there's a definition of vapour products.

Again, based on the way it's described, that could apply to thousands of products. I don't think that's the intention. I think this is poorly written. I've highlighted in the House today that there is legislation out there that better addresses the issues that government is trying to tackle through this legislation. So I don't understand

why government is unwilling to listen to that input.

I'd like to also jump to clause 11 and highlight that there are good things in the legislation, even when it comes to vaping. Under clause 11, it will now be "... an offence for a retailer or other person to sell, give or furnish, directly or indirectly, tobacco, vapour products or non-tobacco shisha to a minor." That's positive. Even when it comes to vaping, there are some elements of this legislation that make reasonable sense. Unfortunately, though, there are some holes in the legislation that government is not willing to address.

I'll jump to clause 13, Madam Chair. I think this is an important point related to the distinction between tobacco and vapour products. These products are not like cigarettes. This is about the opportunity for customers to see the products in the shop and be able to experience the product in a shop. Customers have a right to view the product and make sure that it's a fair purchase. It makes sense to give them an opportunity to be shown how to use the product, taught how to use it safely. I just think that's responsible.

I'll ask the minister: Why are you unwilling to allow vapour shops – why can't we make some kind of modification to this legislation to allow products to be tested in store by trained staff of vapour shops? Why won't we make a change so that the legislation is similar to the legislation that exists in Manitoba that would allow customers, as they can do today, to test products in vapour shops?

It's a simple change. It would make a huge difference to the vaping community. It would make a huge change for the businesses that are affected. So if I can ask for anything at the Committee stage of the debate, Madam Chair, that is it: Will the minister entertain a change? Will she press pause and entertain a change that will allow for products to be tested in vape shops?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Seniors, Wellness and Social Development.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: First, given that the Member is talking about the definition of e-cigarettes and talking about Manitoba and what

Manitoba are doing, I would just like to read out the Manitoba definition of e-cigarettes: “a product or device, whether or not it resembles a cigarette, containing a power source and heating element designed to vapourize an e-substance for inhalation or release into the air.” I think that’s exactly like ours.

Second of all, regarding sampling, we cannot go into liquor stores and sample beer. We cannot go into tobacco stores today and sample cigarettes, different types of cigarettes –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

I have recognized the minister and I ask Members for their co-operation to let her speak while she is on her feet.

Thank you.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: We cannot go into tobacco stores today and sample different types of cigarettes.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. KENT: Does the minister at all acknowledge that there’s a role for vaping to play in harm reduction? Because this legislation goes too far and there are some sensible changes, like the ones I’ve just outlined, that would allow for the vaping industry to function better as it does today. Testing the products in the store is a safety issue. Does the minister not acknowledge that this is about harm reduction and allowing people to understand how to use the products they are using could actually be helpful in that harm-reduction journey?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Seniors, Wellness and Social Development.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: In reference to harm reduction, people will still be shown how to use the cigarette; they just won’t actually be able to use it in the store. So we understand the harm reduction and showing the people how to use the product.

CHAIR: Seeing no further speakers, I’ll ask the Clerk to call

CLERK: Clauses 2 through 20.

CHAIR: Shall clauses 2 to 20 inclusive carry?

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, ‘nay.’

Carried.

On motion, clauses 2 through 20 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, ‘nay.’

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: An Act To Amend The Smoke-Free Environment Act, 2005 And The Tobacco Control Act.

CHAIR: Shall the long title carry.

All those in favour, ‘aye.’

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, ‘nay.’

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report Bill 35, An Act To Amend The Smoke-Free Environment Act, 2005 And The Tobacco Control Act, carried without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: I move, Madam Chair, that the Committee rise and report Bill 35.

CHAIR: The motion is that I do now leave the Chair and report Bill 35.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

MR. SPEAKER (Warr): The hon. the Deputy Chair.

MS. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report Bill 35 carried without amendment.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed her to report Bill 35 carried without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

MR. A. PARSONS: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the bill be read a third time?

MR. A. PARSONS: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

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

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Order 7, second reading of Bill 36.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Environment and Conservation, that Bill 36, An Act To Amend The Victims Of Crime Services Act, be now read the second time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 36, An Act To Amend The Victims Of Crime Services Act, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act To Amend The Victims Of Crime Services Act." (Bill 36)

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

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

I'm happy to stand here and speak to Bill 36, which is another important piece of legislation that concerns the Department of Justice. It's a fairly simple change to a pre-existing piece of legislation.

The technical side of it is that: "Subsection 11.1(1) of the *Victims of Crime Services Act* is repealed and the following substituted: 11.1(1) Where a person is convicted of an offence under an Act of the province and a fine is imposed as a penalty for that conviction, that person shall, in addition to the fine, pay a victim fine surcharge that is 30% of the fine imposed on that person. (2) This Act comes into forces on September 1, 2016."

Quite frankly, what we're doing here, Mr. Speaker, this province has had existing now for over a decade a victim fine surcharge. When the matter goes into court, if there's a provincial offence, whether it's – it can be something that deals with wildlife. It could be something that deals with fisheries. It can be something that deals with a number of provincial pieces of legislation as well as the Criminal Code.

The fact is that there are a number of penalties under sentencing that a court can impose. There are things like probation, things like actual imprisonment. There are a number of prohibitions that can be put on a person. Another thing that can be put on a person also is a fine.

In this case, what we're saying here is that there's already pre-existing a victim fine surcharge. That is a surcharge that is put onto an already existing fine. That money goes into the Treasury. In our case here in this province, that money goes towards paying for a number of things within the Department of Justice, primarily the Victim Services Program.

Up to this point, that fine has been 15 per cent but this year, and with this piece of legislation, we are amending that to 30 per cent. Again, this is a fine surcharge that will only be put on those individuals that are convicted of breaking the law. I think that we need to note that. This is not something that anybody – nobody is going to have to pay this if they didn't do something wrong. That is the basic point that I want to make sure that we get out there.

We have in this province a Victim Services Program, a bunch of great individuals across this province. They work both with the criminal justice system usually. They also work with people within the justice system, and work with justice partners out there in the province. One of the things that we often hear about – and again, I think it is something that we see on the news on a daily basis actually – is the role of a victim within our system.

In many cases we know that people who are involved in the system, if you are the accused, if you are the defendant, you have a lawyer. That lawyer helps navigate through the system for you. We also have, especially when we are dealing with these offences, a Crown prosecutor.

A Crown prosecutor's job is to present evidence on behalf of Her Majesty. Their job is not to get a conviction; their job is to present the case in front of the court. Usually again, it seems that their job is to get a conviction, but that's not the case. It is not a personal matter; it is a matter of laying out the evidence in front of a judge, in front of an impartial trier of fact, in order to establish whether a finding of guilt should be put forward.

They often deal with the victims in these cases, but that's not their primary job. Anybody in this province, anybody in this House that has actually spoken to a victim will tell you that in many cases, they feel lost or disadvantaged at some points in the system – in many cases, through no fault of their own. They are here going through this matter. They may have been the victim of a violent crime, it could be a less violent crime, it could be a financial crime, it could be anything; but anybody who has had something like that committed upon them or alleged to have been committed upon them, that is a difficult thing. It is difficult to deal with the facts of an offence. Especially we've all seen very, very serious cases – it is hard.

So in many cases, these people feel like they have no one. They don't have a private lawyer. They are not going to go out and get a private lawyer to defend their interests because that private lawyer has no role to play in the court system, per se, that's what the Crown prosecutor does; but the Crown prosecutor is handling the case and the fact is that the Crown prosecutor is handling multiple cases with multiple victims and multiple witnesses. So the ability that they have to deal with each individual and provide the attention that the individual often needs is just not there. That's normal, not just in this province, it is normal throughout the system.

What we have here in this province is we have a Victim Services Program and these individuals work with victims. They help guide them through this process which, in many cases, can seem intimidating, can seem invasive; it's certainly very difficult.

In fact, I can remember actually having cases where I was practising – I would have been on the defence side, had my accused that I was representing and dealing with that; but you also

feel for the victim who is sitting there and in many cases didn't have that support, didn't have that individual and you feel for them. It is small-town courtrooms and you're trying to pass along what information you can about what is going to happen next. What happens next in this matter? When are you going to have to show up? What do you have to say? How does this all work?

It's scary and anybody that's ever actually – not even if you're the victim; anybody who has ever been a witness in a matter can tell you it's quite intimidating to get up in that witness box and have a judge ask you questions. I've done it once and I can tell you it's a different story being the person down there asking the questions and the person that is sitting up there getting asked, especially when you throw in the fact that you have a victim.

Again, you have the defence counsel; their job is to cross-examine that individual. You're there to work on behalf of your client. It's a trying process. This program – they've done a great job. I've met a number of people who worked through this program. They support the victim in their critical time of need, especially when it deals with the trauma, the victimization and help them navigate their way through this system.

Under section 11.1, the surcharge that we previously had was 15 per cent of any fine ordered; that came into effect 2006 – 15 per cent of anything, that was added on, and that money would actually get paid first before the fine, all of it goes back into the system that helps pay for the Victim Services Program. It doesn't come close to covering the cost of what that program is. I have some statistics here that I will provide for the information of Members.

Revenue from the surcharge is used to cover the cost of providing services to victims. No one is going to argue about the importance, the purpose and the necessity of this. The problem is, though, that we need money to help pay for this service. I think the budget runs into the \$2 million to \$3 million range, but we don't recoup anywhere near that. We get some federal investment, but again, it can cost money. So in this case what we're suggesting is that we should increase that to 30 per cent. This handles the *Highway Traffic Act*; it can handle the federal matters, forestry, wildlife, anything.

One thing I will note is that individuals have a right – there is ability for the judge in these matters to exercise discretion to exempt an individual from paying the surcharge, if they can satisfy the court that paying it will create an undue hardship to the individual or their dependants.

So let's keep in mind first of all, if you're paying a surcharge, you were convicted of breaking the law. That's the first thing to keep in mind here. The second thing is that this service helps provide for those individuals that are wrong because of the breaking of law.

What we're saying here is that we feel, given the fiscal circumstances that we find ourselves in, given the fact that the surcharge revenues never come close to paying off the amount, we think that we need to do more to make sure that we have these individuals to provide the service. We're suggesting that it go up to 30 per cent.

The next part of it, though, is that there are individuals that go into court, there are individuals that are convicted of fracturing the law, but in many cases the fact is that imposing this fine will carry with it a legitimate hardship. Not everybody has that case; some do. It's up to that individual or their solicitor to argue in front of a judge and to show proof, I would suggest, that the imposition of this fine and the payment of this fine are not possible. It will create undue hardship on them. Maybe they have dependants. Maybe they have situations that to do this will not do justice to where we need to be. So it does give the judge the discretion which is something that I've liked that I've seen in the past.

The anticipated increase in revenue – and it's hard to tell where it's going to be, but it would be anticipated to be in the range of \$700,000 per year with money collected being used to offset the cost of the program. The fines, we get roughly around the range of \$800,000 per year. Right now they're averaging a collection rate of about 80 per cent.

The judge has the discretion under 11.1(3) to not impose the surcharge, again, a critical aspect of this. The staff of Victim Services is dedicated to the provision of client-centred services which foster the promotion of personal safety. To break that down to its most basic, if you're a victim

going through this system it's daunting, it's hard, it's difficult, you've already suffered enough and the fact is that we're trying to make it easier on you. We're trying to make sure that you have supports there.

I did get some information provided by my staff, who I appreciate the staff to take the time to make sure this information is available to individuals. The province budgeted approximately \$3.1 million to operate Victim Services this year. So you're averaging about \$800,000 received; it's costing you \$3.1 million to run. That's offset by the feds coming in with \$750,000 annually from a federal funding agreement. Last year, there was \$754,000 in revenue from these victim fine surcharges which was both federal and provincial.

There's always a little bit of discrepancy in the budgeted and actual revenue, given the fact that there's obvious uncertainty around the imposition and the collection of this. Last year saw approximately \$1 million in victim fine surcharges with an \$800,000 collection rate. So the fact is it's easy to see there that even with this increase we are still not recouping the total cost of victim services programs. We are just not recouping it.

I think I'll stop at that point there. I know the Opposition has had an opportunity to be briefed on this legislation and to meet with staff. I know some of the researchers are taking the time to reach out to my staff, and I think they've had their questions answered.

Before I do, just some stats put out there. In 2012-2013, there was just over a million dollars imposed, \$1.078 million, \$812,000 collected. The year after, \$908,400 imposed, \$851,000 collected. In 2014-2015, \$851,200 imposed, \$806,700 collected. So there is a pretty good collection rate on this, which is nice. This money is all going to what I would deem – unfortunately, we wish it was an unnecessary situation. We wish we didn't have to use this money, but the fact is we do.

So on that note, I look forward to the debate by my Members opposite and answering questions during the Committee stage.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to stand and have a few words on Bill 36, An Act To Amend The Victims Of Crime Services Act. I appreciate the details and some of the statistics the hon. minister just mentioned that time in concluding his remarks.

I want to mention as well – he mentioned in regard to staff of the department and giving a briefing. I certainly appreciate that as well, in terms of the work that was done and answering questions that may have existed, and work through the bill. As we go to Committee we'll have probably a few more questions as well.

From the information we got when going through this, the bill amends the *Victims of Crime Services Act* to increase the victim fine surcharge from 15 to 30 per cent. This would include all provincial offences, except parking offences and municipal bylaws. This rate is consistent, my understanding, with federal offence surcharges as well. A cross-jurisdictional scan of provinces, I don't think shows consistency between all provinces, and I don't think there was information on the specific rates of all provinces when we went through the actual information from the department.

The minister also referenced all funds raised through surcharges go back into Victim Services programs, which we know are vitally important. Services provided would include counselling, assistance in preparing statements, advising of rights, and other such functions.

The only ones negatively affected by such charges are those being charged with an offence and required to pay a fine. In regard to Victim Services programs, the minister also referenced the fact that there's also joint federal-provincial partnerships in regard to providing those services that are needed.

From our perspective, obviously, this is an amendment that is required. We certainly recognize and support it. Things that we may look at when we get to committee, some of the things that came up: How much additional

funding will be anticipated through this amendment? All the additional funding go back to Victim Services programs. I think he indicated it may have but we could certainly confirm that when we go through committee.

He also talked about, from a provincial budgetary perspective in terms of what's estimated and what the actuals really are at the end of the year. Also, there's often discrepancies for various reasons and what that would be. So we may talk about that as well.

We will talk about department Estimates. Victim Services programs are located, I think it's section 4.2.01 in the budget. I don't know what cuts, if any, were made this year in the Victim Services program in *Budget 2016*. We want to talk about those in regard to what the impact of those may be. As well, how does this 30 per cent surcharge stack up against other provinces in their surcharges on provincial offences?

Those are some of the things, as we move into committee, we want to ask. The minister may be able to answer those when he gets up at the end of second reading. We'll leave it for there and listen to what other Members of the House have to say in regard to the bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'm happy to stand and speak to Bill 36, which is *Victims of Crime Services Act*.

We know how important Victim Services is, particularly when we see in the media in the past few weeks, court cases that have been delayed sometimes for years and victims of a crime having to wait for a few years before they get to court. Having to relive an experience of being victimized, of being violated and having to wait and wait and wait for their day in court and waiting then so that they can have closure on this.

This is really tough; really, really tough. Especially in situations where people may have been sexually violated, who may have been sexually assaulted and how tough that is. They wait and they wait and they wait. So we know in situations like that how important Victim Services is.

We know the Victim Services for Newfoundland and Labrador is a free and confidential justice service for victims of crime. It is their principle that all victims are treated with courtesy, compassion and respect. We all know how incredibly intimidating the court experience can be for a victim of crime, that it can be for the average citizen.

Oftentimes, within our judicial system, antiquated words or very complicated words, complicated phrases are used that are really inaccessible to the average citizen, often inaccessible to even people here in this House. Sometimes the wheels of justice (a) move ever so slowly, and (b) it seems very, very complex. So we know how important and crucial the role of Victim Services is in supporting victims of crime.

Supreme Court Justice Derek Green has often spoken out. He speaks annually to the Rotarians through the Rotary Club about his issues about access to justice, and access to justice on a whole number of levels, whether it be the cost, whether it be understanding how the justice system works. We know how difficult that can be and how very difficult it is for victims when they have to wait years and they cannot have closure on what has happened to them.

One of the things that Victim Services does is provide general information about the criminal justice system to help you understand how it works. For most of us, unless we've somehow been swept up into the criminal justice system, we don't know how it works. Many of us are just happy not having to know how it works.

The other thing that Victim Services can do is they can provide you with information on what is happening with your case. How many times family or friends or constituents say they don't know what's happening with their case. There can be all kinds of delays. It's hard to know how come those delays are happening or how long

the delay will be or how come something is caught up in the justice system.

They can do pre-court preparation so you can participate more meaningfully in the court process. We know how intimidating it is to sit in a court of law, particularly if you have to be a witness and how difficult that can be. It's so incredibly intimidating. That's probably not the intent, but particularly when you look at our judicial system, often it's so very adversarial. So (a) if you've been a victim of crime, and (b) then you have to somehow defend – seem what might be defending yourself. The role of Victim Services is so very important there.

They also can help with preparing a victim impact statement if you wish to complete one. Again, depending on the type of crime you have been a victim of, that can be a very, very difficult procedure because you almost relive whatever has happened to you. It's a particularly important part if you're seeking justice. If you're wanting what has happened to you to be authentically witnessed and if you want to go through a court procedure, that's a difficult one.

So having Victim Services with you through that, to help you through that purpose – these are people who are trained to help victims, who are sensitive to the possible effects of having been a victim of a crime. They can help identifying referring you to specialized community resources, if you need them. We know particularly for folks who may have been sexually violated, Victim Services can recommend you to the sexual assault prevention and crisis team.

There are a number of community services that can help you or there are also other community groups that deal with specific types of crimes, people who have been victims of crimes. They can also provide emotional support and short-term counselling as you prepare to go through court, because that is such an intermediating process.

We know that Victim Services does such a crucial job, such an important job and can help to mitigate some of the impacts of having to wait so long for your court case to go through the justice system, and also how confusing and

inaccessible that may seem to the average person, the average citizen.

I also want to thank the staff from the Department of Justice and Public Safety who gave us a great briefing. I was able to stay afterwards and ask some particular questions. They were great. We also sent questions to the department and we were able to get them answered in a timely manner. I really appreciate that work. This is a bill that we can support because it's doing the right thing.

The bill would amend the *Victims of Crime Services Act* to increase the victim surcharge from 15 per cent to 30 per cent. All the proceeds go to Victim Services program, which is run by the Department of Justice and Public Safety. Their folks are really good at the work they do. We've checked that out. We've spoken with people.

Victim Services, in fact, is funded by money made available from surcharges from criminal code and other federal offences, as well as the surcharges from provincial statute offences. That doesn't include parking municipal offences, but bylaws. Money is used to provide those services to victims. It can involve short-term counselling, preparing statements for court which can be such a difficult process.

The other issue I would like to address, Mr. Speaker, is for judges to have discretionary powers to look at – they can exercise their right to exempt an individual from paying if undue hardship to individual or family is possible. I think that is very, very important because the purpose of our justice system is not to knock the feet right out from under people.

If we have someone who has broken the law, in these particular areas, in the area of the *Highway Act* or the *Wildlife Act*, all these are important issues but we don't want our justice system to act in such a way that people cannot come up from under what they have done. They need to be able to provide for themselves. They need to be able to provide for their families.

So I am totally in support of the fact that judges will have the discretionary power to exercise the right to exempt someone from a fine or to reduce – I imagine, I will ask the minister, too – aside

from exemption perhaps, reducing the amount of fine or surcharge. So maybe we can talk about that in committee.

Again, I believe this is a piece of legislation that we certainly can support. It's important. It's supporting the very important work that Victim Services does.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am pleased to stand on my feet once again, this time to speak to Bill 36, An Act to Amend the Victims of Crime Services Act.

I'm going to keep it very brief, Mr. Speaker. The bottom line here is what we're seeing is legislation that is going to support the victims of crime and they are going to be supported at the expense of the perpetrators of that same crime. As far as I'm concerned, it's the way to go and I support the legislation.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: If the hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety speaks now, he will close the debate.

The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

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

I want to thank my colleagues for their contributions to this debate. I appreciate their support as well. I just wanted to go back through some of the questions asked. If I don't provide the proper answer, right answer, I still have the Committee stage to try and get it right the second time.

To my colleague for St. John's Centre who asked about the fine and can the judge reduce the fine; the judge is the one giving the fine. The judge will give what they feel is an appropriate fine based on case law, based on the circumstances of the matter, based on a number of factors. What I would suggest –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, they have the ability to waive it, to apply it or to alter it. I would also suggest that I think they have – when they give their penalty, they would be cognizant of that.

The way it goes is that, just say you apply a fine of X number of dollars and then the 30 per cent surcharge. That surcharge actually gets paid first and goes towards Victim Services. The fine then goes into – I don't want to say to the Treasury, but the fine goes wherever fines go. That one gets paid first.

Whenever judges do sentencing they're cognizant of the factors that are put in front of them. In many cases they'll often just waive it; sometimes they keep it in full. The good news is – and I've seen judges do this before – it's their discretion. We trust our judges to make these decisions and so I'm happy that – obviously I wasn't going to make a change like this if you couldn't keep the same discretion.

To my colleague from – the Opposition House Leader, I think you wanted to know the provincial rates. I'll go down through them. Each one is different. There are as many changes and differences here. BC is 15 per cent on a provincial fine. Alberta is 15 per cent on a provincial fine. Saskatchewan actually has a sliding scale that's done in dollars. So it's \$40 where the fine is \$99 or less, \$50 where it's – whatever.

When you get down to subsection (e) it's 40 per cent of the fine imposed where the fine imposed is greater than \$500. When the fine is at \$500 or greater, it's 40 per cent, which is a pretty substantial amount. They also have one there if there's no fine imposed, they actually have a \$50 victim surcharge. So even if there's no fine, that surcharge comes on.

Manitoba has 25 per cent. Ontario also has a sliding scale here based on the fine range. The surcharge is as low as \$10 on a zero to \$50 fine, but when you get up to over \$1,000, it's 25 per cent of the actual fine.

Quebec's changes; Quebec's has a percentage as well as a dollar, depending on the fine. New Brunswick is 20 per cent. Nova Scotia is 15 per

cent. PEI is actually a flat rate of \$25. I'm not sure what they take in, but I'm willing to guess it's much lower than every other province and jurisdiction. The Yukon is 15 per cent and Northwest Territories is 15 per cent, or if there's no fine, it can be \$25. So we really are all over the place. It can be all over the map there.

Any money that is raised – and they are anticipating, say it's \$700,000 – every bit of that goes right into Victim Services programs to offset the cost. That's where all the money goes. It goes right into that cost that's already there.

I can say to the Member opposite, there was no job loss in this particular aspect of justice. I don't recall hearing the Leader of the Official Opposition ask any questions on that during the Estimates. It didn't pop up to him when he was going through the line by line.

You will also notice we put in a date of September 1. September 1 was what we felt was best to capture that extra revenue but, at the same time, provide at least basically three months' notice so people can be aware and judge themselves accordingly.

We didn't want to wait until December. We thought that was a bit long. So we went with a September 1 date, which we think is ample opportunity to advise people of this change and tell people if they were to break any of our laws, they may be subject to a doubling of the victim fine surcharge. I hope we don't have to take any, but the fact is that's not how it works.

Thank you so much for the opportunity. If there are any questions, I'll answer them during the Committee stage, Mr. Speaker.

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

The motion is that Bill 36 be now read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Against?

Carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Victims Of Crime Services Act. (Bill 36)

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

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Now.

On motion, a bill "An Act To Amend The Victims Of Crime Services Act," read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 36)

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Municipal Affairs, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 36.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: Opposed?

Carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Dempster): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 36, An Act To Amend The Victims of Crime Services Act.

A bill, "An Act To Amend The Victims Of Crime Services Act." (Bill 36)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

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

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

I have a question for the minister that, in fact, the budget for Victim Services, the provincial allotment, was \$564,000 in 2013; \$564,000 in 2014; and in 2016, it's \$563,000. Now, we have seen an increase of the surcharges being doubled. Will we see an increase in the money allotted to Victim Services due to that doubling of the surcharge?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

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

I'm not going to commit here on the record that there will be a doubling of this, certainly not. I think what we've looked at here is that the cost for running this aspect is about \$3.1 million. Again, anything that we get will go towards that but, even with this, I still don't know if we're going to be able to cover off the cost of that.

It is one of those things where you have to judge it on an annual basis. This is the first year that I've had experience of doing this process. I'm always willing to listen to people to see are there changes that need to be made. Are there more investments or different investments that need to be made? So I don't want to say that I'm not open to change or to considering that – everything that you do in light of the fiscal circumstance that we find ourselves in.

I'm not one that, in tough times, thinks that we need to forget these individuals who, through no fault of their own, find themselves in this position; but I don't want to sit here and commit that with the doubling of the surcharge that we will see a doubling of the amount allotted for that.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for St. John's Centre.

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

Just for a point of clarification, can the minister tell me for the budget for the Victim Services, where that money comes from? I assume some of it is a provincial allotment. Is all of it simply from the surcharges? If so, if we are doubling the surcharges, has the budget for Victim Services increased? I can see that there appears to be an increase of almost \$500,000. Is that a budgetary increase for Victim Services in '16-'17 over '15-'16?

So is there a decrease in general revenue going to Victims Services, but an increase in surcharges, some of the money from surcharges going to make up any kind of difference?

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

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

This program is funded, obviously, through the budget process. There are two sources of revenue. So last year it was \$499,900 from the feds; \$754,000 from victim fine surcharges. The 2016-2017 budget, the federal revenue went to \$750,000; and again, it is the same, \$754,000 allotted from victim fine surcharges or anticipated to get there. That still doesn't cover off the cost of what it costs to provide this program.

What we do know is that even if double this up to the \$1.5 million, we're still not going to be there. The budget has increased this year – revenue received will be used to offset it, but again, it will not exceed what our costs are.

I don't know if I quite answered it, but I'm certainly willing to take another question.

CHAIR: Seeing no further speakers, shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

CLERK: Clause 2.

CHAIR: Shall clause 2 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 2 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: An Act To Amend The Victims Of Crime Services Act.

CHAIR: Shall the long title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

All those against, 'nay.'

CHAIR: Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report Bill 36 carried without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: I move, Madam Chair, that the Committee rise and report Bill 36.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 36.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

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

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): The hon. the Deputy Speaker.

MS. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report Bill 36 carried without amendment.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed her to report Bill 36 carried without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

MR. A. PARSONS: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

When shall the bill be read a third time?

MR. A. PARSONS: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

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

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that the House resolve itself into a Committee to consider a resolution respecting the imposition of a Deficit Reduction Levy on taxable income, Bill 14

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to debate Bill 14.

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Dempster): Order, please!

We are now debating the related resolution and Bill 14, An Act To Amend The Income Tax Act, 2000 No. 2.

Resolution

"That it is expedient to bring in a measure respecting the imposition of a temporary deficit reduction levy on taxable income."

CHAIR: Shall the resolution carry?

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I am certainly going to stand here for a few minutes and speak to Bill 14, which is An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act, or as I'm sure people in this House and people at home would be aware, this is the piece of legislation that will allow the temporary introduction of the deficit levy.

Madam Chair, I call Members of this hon. House to note on page 3 of the bill, under section 2, the language that says, "An individual shall pay a deficit reduction levy in accordance with subsection (3) for each of the taxation years 2016 to 2019, inclusive" The bill further goes on to explain the amount of tax that will be applicable in those years.

Madam Chair, as we have said during the budget and as we've said in this House, particularly through the budget debate as well as in the Budget Speech, the temporary deficit levy was required for us to bring financial stability back to the province, particularly when it comes to our ability to borrow. The decisions in *Budget 2016* were very difficult for the people of the province who after many, many years of being told that everything was okay and that everything was great, we were now in a situation where we had a significant deficit.

I'd remind Members of this House that having attained peak oil in 2007, peak oil production in 2008, the province saw some of its highest revenue for a period of years –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MS. C. BENNETT: Thank you, Madam Chair, for asking people in the House to make it easier for me to hear you. I appreciate that.

As we've talked about in the budget debate, the very serious fiscal challenge that we had facing the province, we had to look at ways of increasing revenue while we continued to look at the other ways that we need to implement to be able to get the very significant deficit that we have under control.

It's interesting, Madam Chair, as I've sat here and listened to the debate over the last number of hours on a number of different topics that –

and the debate over a number of weeks – the deficit levy has consumed so much of the dialogue, which I have a tremendous amount of empathy for. I understand why people of the province are angry about paying this paying this deficit levy.

Quite frankly, as the minister responsible for Finance, I'm angry that we had to bring it in as part of our budget. We have a \$1.8 billion deficit that would have been \$2.7 billion had we not undertaken some actions. The fact that we've been able to, unlike Alberta, maintain what is a very low rating in the rating agencies to further protect the cost of borrowing, when we have so much borrowing to do, Madam Chair; while I'm certainly frustrated with the situation that we find ourselves in, just like every Newfoundlander and Labradorian, I can say that I'm very pleased to stand today and speak to this bill which clearly outlines in legislation that this tax is temporary.

The changes that we announced will be effective January 2016, with administration starting as of July 2016, which means that the effective rates for 2016, as we have said repeatedly in this House, will in fact be half of the full year implementation rates for this tax year of 2016.

Madam Chair, as we notified the people of the province, we were able to make some modifications to the temporary deficit levy as soon as we had access to cash that we could put into the deficit levy, which is something we said all along we were going to do. That redesigned temporary Deficit Reduction Levy now is expected to generate approximately \$42 million in 2016-17 and annualized to \$61 million.

Recently, our government, as I've said, made these very positive changes based on feedback from people in the province to the temporary deficit levy that was originally announced in *Budget 2016*. These changes will have a positive impact on residents of the province, especially for low-income residents, which is an important priority for this government, I'd add, Madam Chair.

We have increased the threshold from a taxable amount of \$20,000 to a taxable amount of \$50,000, meaning that people with taxable income of \$50,000 or less will not have to pay

any levy. Further to that, we are changing the amounts of the levy for those with taxable income of more than \$50,000 and we are making the distribution even more progressive.

Those with taxable income between \$50,000 and \$100,000 can expect to pay less under the redesigned temporary levy, with an estimated 74 per cent of tax filers – 74 per cent, Madam Chair – paying no levy. That will be three of four Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that will not be paying the deficit levy.

This is in response to the concerns that we heard from people of the province about the levy. As soon as we were in a position to make changes, we made them. Madam Chair, as we said when we made the announcement about the changes, we intend to make changes to this piece of legislation as soon as we are in the financial position to be able to do so.

Madam Chair, we have been open and transparent about the necessity of the budget decisions and the costs for all residents if we did nothing. This doesn't change the unprecedented fiscal situation we are facing. We are facing a \$1.8 billion deficit. We have the highest net debt per capita of any province in Canada, and in some cases we are double what many other provinces in Canada are, per person in our province.

Revenue from the levy is going to reduce the deficit. If not for the introduction of this levy the 2016-17 deficit would have been \$74.8 million higher than the current projected deficit of \$1.8 million.

Madam Chair, we looked at other jurisdictions, our government did, and used –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

I ask Members for their co-operation to keep the noise level down a bit in the Chamber.

Thank you.

MS. C. BENNETT: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Government looked at other jurisdictions and used the Ontario's health insurance premium as a model to develop a Deficit Reduction Levy for Newfoundland and Labrador; but, unlike Ontario's health premium, the Newfoundland and Labrador temporary deficit levy is not permanent. This legislation proves that, Madam Chair.

We have been very open and transparent with the people of the province. I had people come up to me, Madam Chair, and say, why didn't you call it a health care tax. Quite frankly, we felt that would be disingenuous. We wanted to be transparent and open about the purpose for this levy. We wanted the people of the province to know what the truth was about the levy, and we are committed to eliminating the levy as soon as possible.

Madam Chair, unlike Ontario's health premium, the Newfoundland and Labrador levy is specifically to address the unprecedented deficit that we are dealing with. The legislation as it is presented requires, as it should, great detail as to the implementation of this temporary deficit levy, and I look forward to the discussions in this House as we debate this important piece of legislation.

As I mentioned in the beginning, Madam Chair, a piece of legislation that no Member on either side of this House could stand here and proudly say that we are implementing, but can certainly say that without it our province would be faced with some very serious financial challenges that could, and would, impede the ability of our province to be able to provide health care and education in the future.

Madam Chair, I remind the Members of this House not to forget – as I'm sure they won't – the fact that we are spending more on debt expense. To those members of the public who have emailed me and asked me this question, when we say debt expense, we don't mean the interest and the principle; we mean just the interest on debt. No principle payment, Madam Chair. We are spending more on debt expense than we are on educating our children. Quite frankly, I believe that for every hon. Member in this House that is a very serious situation for our province to be in.

Madam Chair, the other thing I would like to say before I sit down is I understand why people of the province have had such a strong reaction to this budget. They were told for years and years and years that finally we were in a position of have and things were going to be all okay from a revenue perspective.

Instead, we've seen with the increase in spending by the former administration, as well as the significant change in oil price that we continue to experience, the revenue of this province, the revenue of this provincial government was severely impacted. As a result, it made the programs that were in place and the services that were in place cost more this year, by \$1.8 billion, than the revenue we actually had to spend.

Madam Chair, I thank the Members of the House for quieting down when you asked them to while I spoke. I look forward to continuing to hear this debate as we progress through this evening.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon the Member for Ferryland.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's a pleasure to rise tonight to speak to Bill 14. I know for the next few hours or maybe longer we'll have some time to have further discussions on the bill. I'm sure everybody on all sides will stand and have their thoughts, no doubt, on the actual bill, Madam Chair.

This certainly is one of a number of pieces of enabling legislation related to *Budget 2016*. This is probably the one that has caused – one of many. There are many issues in the budget that cause concerns to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. No doubt, this one was the lightning rod in regard to what it represented. Some have called it a levy to live in Newfoundland and Labrador, just an outright tax for people in Newfoundland and Labrador of all ages, demographics.

The minister referenced the fact that there were some adjustments made to the levy in regard to some changes that were made, and I'll speak to that shortly. As I said, overall this is one of many components of the budget that was brought down by the Liberal government. As we talked about over the past number of weeks and number of months, it was about choices. The fiscal situation that was available, how would you deal with that? This was one component that was decided on and something we wouldn't have done. This was one element that was suggested by the Liberal government on how they would deal with some of the issues that were being faced.

It's very different from what we heard in the fall when they were running for election. When they indicated things like there would be no HST, no layoffs of the public service. Then after the election we saw a pretty abrupt turn in what their policy was and what they were going to do. One of them was the levy. The Liberal levy was laid out in the budget and is part of what we're discussing here tonight.

As part of that, the minister referenced some changes that were made, that looked at the original range of \$20,000 to \$50,000 that originally was included in regard to that particular levy and who had to pay it. She referenced the fact that there were discussions with the federal government and they were able, through that, to get some relief on an outstanding loan related to equalization from a number of years that they wouldn't have to pay. Due to that, they had put in their budget dollars to pay that, as if they would have to pay it.

We have found out that the Minister of Finance herself, on a public airwave, indicated that in December they had started talking to the federal government about changes that could be made in regard to the equalization loan that was outstanding. She indicated there were meetings in December, and also in January and further on, up to a few weeks ago, when the federal minister in the cabinet for Newfoundland and Labrador, Minister Foote, brought everybody in and announced they weren't relieving us of any of the loan that was outstanding, but they were pushing it down the road. They were going to push it down to 2022.

So really no big benefit to us, but for the minister, they had indicated they put money in the budget to pay for it. With that, they would have money they could put towards the overall revenue they had indicated for the levy.

It's interesting to note, that through the fall, in the early first quarter of any particular year you're going through a budget process. So usually you'd look at all avenues for expenses, all avenues for revenue generation. In that, obviously, you'd look domestically around the province and things you're doing here in regard to public policy, but you'd also look federally. What programs, federally, do we draw on during the year? What programs haven't we drawn on? What programs could we expand on to increase our revenues?

Interestingly enough, while the minister says they were meeting in December and January on getting relief, there was no evidence of it in the budget – no evidence whatsoever. It was interesting that when Minister Foote came here, she indicated they had been negotiating for the past week or so, yet we heard something different from the Minister of Finance. So if you're negotiating or you're going through a process with the federal government to try and relinquish or reduce some payments on an outstanding loan, why wouldn't you include that in your budget when you're going through? I think it was approximately annually this year would be \$27 million and \$27 million for future years. So that's a bit interesting. There seems to be some discrepancy in that.

I asked today the minister in Question Period about that discrepancy, what the federal minister had said and what had been said in regard to when negotiations started. I understand it's a negotiation, but really it's a loan that's been set up to be paid on. The question would be, I guess, to the federal government. It didn't relieve any of the actual amounts you had to pay back; it just said we're going to push it out. So there's not a huge negotiation going on there; it's can we do it or can we not.

I guess they decided at some point, yes, we would relieve you of that for a period of time until 2022 when you wouldn't have to pay it back. Because of that – getting back to what we're talking about here tonight, the levy – they

announced that they could reduce the levy because some of that money they allocated to put towards that loan they would now use to offset what they expected to raise in the actual levy.

Inherent in that is an issue we've talked about and questioned the Premier on and the government on in the past number of weeks here in the House, dating back to when the House opened. The whole issue of equalization, the stabilization fund and what happens in Canada, the particular provinces, in regard to getting access to funds when the revenues decline and when, comparatively, their services and programs they're delivering can't be delivered comparably to other provinces in Canada.

We had asked why wouldn't you go back and revisit with the federal government, recognizing that we've had a substantial decline in our royalties over one year, the stabilization fund with equalization says a 50 per cent reduction. We got that.

There's \$18 billion being paid out this fiscal year by the federal government – \$18 billion. Newfoundland and Labrador, I think, in the last fiscal year is getting \$32 million. That's \$18 billion being paid out across Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador got \$32 million.

So we asked the Premier why not go and argue that we're a commodity-based economy, oil and gas. Why not go back and say let's make a case, let's make an argument. Let's make an argument to help us out.

Alberta, Saskatchewan, they've made the case. They continue to make it. As I've said, \$18 billion. Who made the case for us? We've got seven Liberal MPs in Ottawa –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. HUTCHINGS: We've got a Premier here that says – I think he said when he came back: It is what it is. Well, that's not good enough. It's not it is what it is. In Canada, as this federation, we get an opportunity to reach out in time of need and to get access to equalization.

Now, we know there is a formula there; indeed there is. Right now, currently, it is a three-year period and after that, there is a review. I think there's two years again after that before it can be readjusted. But we all know in Parliament there is legislation; there are regulations that go through the Lieutenant Governor in Council. There are all kinds of methods or interventions that can be made to assist any particular province.

We've seen it in our history. Certainly nothing against Quebec, but Bombardier in Quebec from time to time has gotten intervention and other industries in Canada as well when things drop off. So that's all we're asking for that a particular time, we have some intervention by our government by the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador to intervene and ask for that assistance.

Some would say, well, you're getting a handout. Well, no, that's what equalization is about, providing assistance. That is what the Federation of Canada is all about. That is one of the benefits of being part of the Federation of Canada, that there is that help there and assistance in time of need. That's what it's about.

For the past number of years, we haven't availed of equalization. Ontario has, and that's good. Quebec has and Nova Scotia has – various jurisdictions like that. And that's fine; that's what it is there for. When times when industry or actual activity in your economy through world – we will say what's happening around the world or other things that are happening that's causing revenues to fall, especially related to commodities and natural resources, that that ability is there to reach out and get access to funds that are available.

As I said, that's what's been part of the Canadian Federation is all about. But for some reason, we didn't do that. The current government didn't do that, didn't fight for it. This fiscal year, as I said, we have \$18 billion being distributed through equalization and Newfoundland is getting \$32 million.

With that as well, that's for delivering of programs and services, which is very important when you think about it because for equalization, to receive that money, it helps with

delivering an average or a certain level of program and service throughout Canada.

So what this budget is doing is a lot of taxes, a lot of fees on that side of the ledger, just generating it right out of people's pockets, but to do what? To maintain program and services – well, that is what equalization is there for. In times of need, when a province would need it, the federal government would partner with you to make sure that you can maintain that level of service that is consistent with other provinces across Canada.

So instead of taxing and feeing and certainly having a dramatic impact on the economy that's slowing already, we didn't go look – we said, no, it is what it is – for a program that's there for that sole purpose, to assist us through a year or two in rough times to get us through that period.

It's important to this whole budget discussion; that's what it's about. It's about how do we get through a difficult period. How do we continue to provide that consistent level of programs and services to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, all over Newfoundland and Labrador?

We know we're dispersed; we know at times it's difficult. Everybody understands that in terms of delivering programs and services in our various parts of the provinces, certainly on the Island, to remote areas and remote communities, in Labrador, whether that's schools, health care services, all of those things, whether it's getting there by ferry, whether by transportation, whether by roads it's very important.

So providing those services takes a lot. This year we're up to, I think, maybe about \$8.4 billion in regard to our budget this year, which mind you is I think up to almost \$400 million from what it was last year. So the budget hasn't gone down; it actually has increased a little from what it was last year, which is interesting as well. We've always heard from this government that when your budget has been too high, you're spending too much. Yet, from last year to this year, the budget has gone up. That's something as well to consider, Madam Chair.

As we get into discussion tonight, I mean this is about the levy, but obviously it's broad based. It's a money bill. So we can talk about all

aspects of the budget, about the economy of Newfoundland and Labrador, or anything that's really important to Members in the House here and how it relates to continuing to grow our economy and do the things we need to do, from an economic perspective and as well from a social perspective to make sure we're doing and delivering those services.

It will be a good debate because there are differing views from both sides in regard to what has transpired in the past, what's been done today in this budget and what our vision or direction is to the future and how we're going to do that. That's really important too.

In our term in government, we certainly invested heavily in infrastructure. We needed to build and rebuild what we needed to do to drive the economy of Newfoundland and Labrador, whether that's reduced taxation to put money in people's pockets to make sure that they're able to spend, drive small business, drive activities in the economy. That's very important.

What we've seen with this budget calls into question. Even economists say you can't tax and fee yourself back to prosperity, but that's what this budget is all about. That's really a concern for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. This budget, in a slowing economy like ours, we need incentives to get the economy going, to get small business, to get at least maintained. To do that, people have to have money in their pockets.

We understand, too, everybody has to give a little bit, but it's about the threshold. It's about the balance of how you do it. You do it over a period of time, and you have a plan laid out. If you have targets and you can show people what direction you're going in and give people confidence that you're on a plan, you know what you're doing and people have hope that there may be some tough days ahead but at the end of that road we're in a good place.

I think the province is well-grounded today. Over the past number of years we've created a good balance in the province, but it's very important in the next couple of years we're able to maintain that. We're able to maintain our people and continue to grow our population.

In terms of our youth, the demographics we know in our province, where they're headed. We need to have our youth stay. We need new people to come to our province, to grow our province, to grow our industries. That's what it's about. It's about current dollars for driving in the revenue and the economy. There's also new dollars driving the economy, new money, through diversification and other activities we need to do.

So, Madam Chair, I look forward to the debate tonight and maybe later on in the morning as we proceed here. I look forward to all Members engaging and all Members giving their thoughts as we move forward.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm just going to stand for a few minutes because, obviously, the Member for Ferryland – who I have a lot of respect for and the Opposition House Leader – has no idea about equalization. He has absolutely no idea. For that Member –

MR. HUTCHINGS: Here we go.

MR. JOYCE: He says, here we go. Yes, because I have to give you the lesson on it.

For that Member to stand up here in this House of Assembly and say how there's so much money spent on equalization, we only have \$30 million-something. I have to remind that Member, twice when equalization was up for renewal, they didn't even ask for any changes to it. The next change is in 2019. For that Member to stand in his place, either he doesn't understand how equalization works, or he has done no research and just standing up going on with all his political rhetoric.

Madam Chair, for him to stand in this hon. House and say the reason why we're in such a

financial shape is because we didn't go ask for equalization when that government, that government had two opportunities –

AN HON. MEMBER: How many?

MR. JOYCE: Two opportunities to go for equalization changes and refused to do it.

Now, that Member should stand and apologize for the things he just said. Because if he doesn't understand, just say I don't understand, fine, but I refuse to stand here and sit here and listen to that Member tell us that we wouldn't go for equalization, that's why we're in such a poor financial state.

Let's talk about Nalcor this year; \$1.3 billion gone into Nalcor – \$1.3 billion cash this year alone, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair, Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair, when is the last time you saw capital works spent up in your district? When is the last time? Do you know what they used to do? Pick and choose where they were going to spend the money. Now they're talking about economic diversification; \$63 million on the Trans-Labrador Highway. That's a waste of money. That's not economic diversification. That's a waste of money to do the Trans-Labrador Highway. That's a waste of money, according to the Members opposite.

Madam Chair, I'll ask you a question. I heard them talking about, where was the government? How come you didn't do your due diligence? I ask the Members opposite – five of them who are sitting there now were in government. When Astaldi put up that dome and took down that dome, where were you asking questions: Why are the taxpayers of the province paying for it? Where were you?

So don't stand here in this House of Assembly and say every problem we have here is because of us and our budget. Where were you when you should have asked Nalcor the tough questions? Where were you? You never opened your mouth, never asked a question.

Do you know what they were doing, Madam Chair? They were writing a blank cheque; here you go, keep her going. This is the result of the

negligence by the previous government. No questions asked.

I remember when the former minister, Derrick Dalley, stood on his feet – I like Derrick Dalley, a great guy, a very nice guy – and we asked, who paid for the dome? Who paid to put the dome up and who paid to take the dome down? He said Astaldi paid for all of that. We said, well, did you ask any questions. Nah, they're taking care of all that. Now we see the result of letting the ship go without a captain at its helm, Madam Chair.

Now, all of a sudden you say but it's all your fault because you didn't ask for equalization. When that government had two opportunities, Madam Chair, not only that – I like the Member for Ferryland, I have to say. I respect him, but, Madam Chair, do not stand in this House and ask us why we're not doing things for economic development when you had a \$34.9 million agreement from the federal government sitting on your desk and you wouldn't even take the pen to sign it and send it off to Ottawa – \$34.9 million.

The money that was announced two weeks ago, myself and Judy Foote announced money two weeks ago, that was the same agreement they wouldn't even sign – \$34.9 million, and wouldn't even sign. It's signed. The projects now are sent off, Madam Chair, yet we're doing nothing for rural Newfoundland and Labrador, nothing for diversification.

Now, that's the kind of things, Madam Chair, that I tell you is hard to stand and listen to anymore. No doubt, we're in a financial situation. Absolutely no doubt, but they say, well, let's not talk about the past. Let's not talk about the \$200 million boondoggle out in Grand Falls. Let's not talk about \$30 million where they wanted to become Jed Clampett down in Parsons Pond somewhere drilling oil. That's \$30 million. Let's not talk about any of that.

Madam Chair, let's not talk about the \$180 million capital works for the province, spread out all around Newfoundland and Labrador. Oh, we can't talk about that. Let's not talk about how Judy Foote, all our MPs, seven MPs and the federal government came and stood up and said we're going to help rural Newfoundland and

Labrador. We're going to help Labrador. We're going to help Newfoundland and Labrador. They came through with the Canada Build Fund; the new Canada Build Fund. But we can't talk about that.

We can't talk about that, Madam Chair, because all we have to talk about is equalization. The Member opposite, who I have a lot of respect for, obviously don't understand equalization. I'm sorry to say, you just don't understand it. Because you sat in that chair when you had an opportunity to stand up and fight for Newfoundland and Labrador, ask for changes, and they didn't do it.

Just like Nalcor. What did they do? They kept on writing blank cheques. The project of Nalcor, Madam Chair, has gotten so large now – this is the other part that we always hear. We're going to bring in billions of dollars from Muskrat Falls, billions of dollars.

Madam Chair, do you know where the money is coming from? This massive project, cost overruns, do you know where the money is coming from? It's coming from the taxpayers of Newfoundland and Labrador who are forced, absolutely forced to pay the rates because of the deal that this government struck. This government, when they struck this deal here, they turned around and what did they do? They said you can't have any more technology in Newfoundland and Labrador. You can't have any more technology because you have to buy the power of Newfoundland and Labrador, Muskrat Falls.

If any new technology is in this world, absolutely any more in this world, Madam Chair, we can't use it. When they talk about the billions of dollars we're going to get, it's from the taxpayers with their rate increases, and they know it. They know it. Then you want to talk about responsible government, absolutely we're in a tough bind. We're in a tough bind.

AN HON. MEMBER: Why are we?

MR. JOYCE: We're in a tough bind because we inherited the tough bind, Madam Chair.

I heard speakers talking about the \$27 million from equalization – oh, we knew that before the

budget. We knew that. We shouldn't have put it in the budget. Yeah, we knew all that.

I ask the Member – he was the minister of Fisheries I believe he was and he was in Intergovernmental Affairs. How long did it take you to sign the CETA agreement? How long? You knew it was coming; how long did it take you to sign the CETA agreement?

They were at it for over two years, still not signed. We were sitting down with Ottawa and said: What ways can you help us out? They came up with some ways. We agreed upon it. It wasn't signed until two weeks ago, Madam Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: I don't blame them for not listening, Madam Chair. It wasn't signed until two weeks ago. When it was signed two weeks ago, we lived up to the commitment that we would reduce the levy and that's what we did, the temporary levy.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: The same thing with the gas, it's temporary.

Are we in a tough bind? You better believe we are in a tough bind. We better believe we're in a tough bind. I can tell you when you're talking about economic diversification; we're working now with three different departments to get Crown lands opened up for agriculture to become sustainable, five or six, seven years.

Guess what, Madam Chair? The last 12 years that same land was still there, not touched, not used. Never even put aside Crown lands for agriculture use. Not even looked at. Yet we do it, oh no, we're not doing it fast enough. It's only five months. We're not doing it fast enough.

Then they want to talk about spending money in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, the infrastructure funding. It is the most infrastructure funding going to be spent this year

in Newfoundland and Labrador in memory, Madam Chair. They know it.

Each Member is working with the government. I have to give everybody credit; that's what we should be doing, working together, Madam Chair. I'm not standing here anymore – I understand that we are in a tough fiscal situation and I thank the people of Newfoundland and Labrador for understanding.

I can tell you, Madam Chair – I have 30 seconds left. I heard the Members opposite talking about, okay; go out in your district. I was to the Greater Humber Joint Council this weekend, myself and the Premier. We went to the Greater Humber Joint Council. Do you know their biggest issue down there? It's waste management that this former government put in, the cost of waste management that every town in this province is going to pay because this former government put in waste management. That was the biggest issue at that. The levy wasn't even brought up. The temporary gas tax wasn't brought up.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: The waste management was the biggest issue, Madam Chair. I'll be back again, because I'm not standing for this anymore. If the Member wants some –

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: – some education on equalization, I'll definitely give it to you.

CHAIR: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member his time for speaking has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Cape St. Francis.

MR. K. PARSONS: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'm sure we'll hear from the hon. minister again because he'll probably be the only one get up on

the other side. He'll be up several times; you needn't worry about that.

There was a word used here tonight that –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. K. PARSONS: The word that was used tonight really hits home to everyone here in Newfoundland and Labrador, and it is what this government is saying and it was said here tonight again: You don't understand. No one understands this.

I just looked there a little while ago at Question of the Day on VOCM from last Friday; 28,000 Newfoundlanders that don't understand, voted on it. It's worth your while to go in and have a look at it – 28,000 Newfoundlanders.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. K. PARSONS: That's an insult to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. It really is because do you know what? We all get the opportunity on the weekends to go do things with our constituents.

I'm going to talk – I'm going to be up a few times tonight myself, I would imagine. I'd like to get up as many times as I can because I have different topics I'm going to do. I was at a function down in the Lions Club on Saturday night. I spoke to a lot of people. It was a real nice birthday party. It was a surprise really for the gentleman's birthday. It was one of your typical Newfoundland and Labrador good times. All hands out having a dance and everything else.

Do you know what the number one discussion at that was? It was this budget.

AN HON. MEMBER: The levy.

MR. K. PARSONS: The levy was part of it – everything in the budget.

If you go and look at it, I can remember only a couple of years ago Newfoundlanders and

Labradorians – I stood in this House and I talked about it, how proud we were. We've come a long ways. I can remember going to training courses when I worked with a company. You'd sit down and someone would tell you a Newfie joke. I used to be rotted. Is that all you think about Newfoundlanders is a joke?

Do you know what? Over the last 10 or 15 years, that's changed. Our attitudes have changed. We're not going to put up with it anymore, for one thing. Do you know what? Our whole attitude changed from being laughed at in the rest of Canada to being looked upon as leaders. I really believe our whole attitude changed as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. I know mine did and everybody else.

I'm very proud to be a Newfoundlander and Labradorian, very proud of this place. Like I say in the House every time I get up, it's the greatest place in the world to raise a family, to live. We probably don't have the best weather in the world, but we take advantage of what we have. If it's a rainy, drizzly day, we can take advantage of that. If it's snowing we take – we have great weather. We have all kinds of seasons and everything else. It's great weather. It's a great place to live.

Do you know what this budget has done? This budget has taken away that pride. It's taken away the feeling – I know the hon. Member for CBS says everybody had a bounce in their step. That's after being taken away because everywhere we go – and I know Members opposite, you're feeling the same way. Unless you're living in a bubble when you go back to your districts, I know that everyone in Newfoundland and Labrador, this is the discussion everybody is having. Even friends of mine say Kev, b'y, it's amazing – I go into someone's house or I go to a restaurant and the number one conversation in this province today is the budget, by far. It's the number one conversation and all of you are hearing from it – and don't tell me you're not.

You're hearing from it in Bonavista. You're hearing from it in Terra Nova. You're hearing from it in Labrador.

CHAIR: Order, please!

I remind the Member to direct his comments to the Chair.

MR. K. PARSONS: Okay, Madam Chair, I'll direct my comments.

You're hearing it from down in Cartwright. Everywhere you go, you're hearing it. We are, but just look at what we've done, your choices.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. K. PARSONS: The choices you've made are the wrong choices.

There's nobody in the province that is disputing that we're not in a financial situation. There's nobody in this province disputing that, but there are people like – yesterday I was down to a banquet in Pouch Cove. Wicked, beautiful banquet, Girl Guides, all the young girls, there were all the cookie award winners for selling all the boxes of cookies. I think I'm after eating a bit too many of the cookies myself. I buy a fine lot; if any of them come along, I'll buy a box or two of cookies off them. But it was a real nice award. One of the little girls got up and gave a speech yesterday. It was about a leader – she's giving up this year, and just told what an inspiration she was to her. It was so remarkable. It's unbelievable.

But do you know what? The same thing at that banquet yesterday was the talk about the budget. The people around the table that I was talking to were talking about the budget and the effects it's going to have on the young people, the effects it going to have on education.

I believe that government thought first that people were going to just get up – because the first month we were here all we heard was the blame game, but I think that backfired on them. I really believe that backfired on them because people in the province are looking and saying, listen here, this is what you chose to do. Forget the blame game. The blame game, I think, is gone out the window for you guys.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. K. PARSONS: It's all about the choices you made. I'm sorry to disappoint you. I'm sorry to disappoint the people in Newfoundland and Labrador. When you can go and take \$1 million and cut 54 libraries, that's sad. That is very, very sad. That's a choice you made. You made that choice.

Look at people in Newfoundland and Labrador, what they're saying today. We never saw people come out and protest before like they are. People are out protesting. That's not funny.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. K. PARSONS: No, in your district. There are people all over this Island.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. K. PARSONS: Can't you remember in your district? Just think about your own district, Madam Chair. I can remember lots of years. I can never remember what I'm hearing these days. I can never remember going to – every function you go to and people are talking about devastating this budget is on them, how hard it's going to be on them.

I can never remember an 85-year-old senior telling me what am I going to do now, I have to go pay for a shot that I used to get for nothing over the counter. You're attacking the wrong people. You attacked the wrong people. You're attacking poor Newfoundlanders. You're attacking people that are students.

AN HON. MEMBER: They're hard workers.

MR. K. PARSONS: They're hard-working Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that have been working all their lives to get where they got to. Remember this province in 2003 had the highest poverty level in all of Canada – the highest in all of Canada. Within 10 or 12 years, what did we do as a government? We brought it down, so that it was the lowest, the least number of people in Canada in poverty.

AN HON. MEMBER: Per capita.

MR. K. PARSONS: Per capita, yes. Just think about it. Those are good moves. Those are great moves. You could see it in the people of Newfoundland and Labrador because they had that jump in their step. They had that confidence in people. They walked around with pride.

Today your budget is after taking that all out, taking out the pride that people had. Fear is the biggest problem now in Newfoundland and Labrador. Fear of how we're going to survive, how are we going to do this, how are we going to pay our bills. What choices are we going to have to make? Seniors making choices, whether they turn on the heat or they go buy groceries or they have to go pay for a drug that they used to get before, but now they have to pay for it. It's all about choices. There's a lot of fear. There's a lot of fear out there with our seniors. There's a lot of fear out there with our students.

I know in the area I'm from, the last 10 years it was fantastic, the growth, I know in the Town of Flatrock. I never saw the growth before in housing starts and stuff like that. That's all changed in the last year or so. It's changed big time. It's not all because of your budget. The economy is not doing as good as it was doing and the oil industry is not – and people from Alberta are not getting jobs and there are some people coming home.

There was a sense in all these communities right across – and not only in my area, I'm sure in every area in the province that people had this real good feeling, a real feeling of proud Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. This budget has taken away that. Right now, the fear is whether my grandmother or my grandfather, my father or my mother, my child, how are they going to get by? What's going to happen?

What you're doing, the money that you're taking out of the economy, you're taking it right out of their pockets – right out of their pockets. I spoke to a lady the weekend and she talked about her car insurance coming up in August. She said now I'm going to have to pay an extra 15 per cent extra on my car insurance, aren't I? I said, yes, that's comes in July 1, I believe, and you're definitely going to have to pay more on your insurance.

But that's what you did. You're taking money out of their pockets, and people do have that fear out there. Their fear –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. K. PARSONS: Yes, it was you. Minister, it is your budget. You take responsibility for your own budget, Minister, because it is your budget that brought in the 15 per cent on insurance. Don't say it wasn't us; it was you –

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. K. PARSONS: Thank you.

CHAIR: I remind the hon. Member his time for speaking has expired.

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

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

I'm very happy to stand and to speak to this resolution. Over the past week and a half, two weeks, I have had the honour to stand in this House and to speak specifically about a presentation done by the esteemed economist, Toby Sanger. His presentation is called: Two budgets, similar circumstances. Which would you choose?

What he's doing is comparing the situation of Alberta and Newfoundland and Labrador. Again, Madam Chair, I would like to make the caveat, we know that it's not comparing apples to apples, but there are some glaring similarities in terms of what is happening in Alberta and what is happening in Newfoundland and Labrador but also some very divergent ways of dealing with some of the glaring similarities.

Again, neither Alberta nor Newfoundland and Labrador have control over the price of oil. We do not have control over the price of our commodities, or the price of our natural resources. What we do have control over, to an extent, is the way in which we address them, what our reaction is to it, and how we are going to deal with the incredible challenges that face us.

The two particular similarities that I would like to draw again, as I move on, just to contextualize it, both Alberta and Newfoundland and Labrador are experiencing an extreme financial crunch because of the fast decline in the price of oil and also, in general, other natural resources.

It's thrown both provinces into a tailspin. We also know that Alberta does not have the same debt level that Newfoundland and Labrador has. We all acknowledge that. We know that. So does Toby Sanger who is the economist I'm quoting right now.

We also know that Alberta suffered incredible job losses because of this, as has Newfoundland and Labrador. Alberta has a lot of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and so does Newfoundland and Labrador have a lot of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Both provinces have a lot of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians out of work. We have the highest unemployment rate in the country. That's something we are facing.

Also, in both provinces there are a lot of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who are resilient, who are willing, who are knowledgeable, who are aware of the financial crisis that each province is facing and who are willing to roll up their sleeves and get to work, to get back to work. It's what they want. They want to get back to work. They are also willing to be part of the solution.

However, what we have seen is that both provinces had recent elections. Alberta elected an NDP government. Newfoundland and Labrador elected the current Liberal government. Both of our budgets came down on exactly the same day. How likely was that? April 14, 2016, both budgets came down the same day. That's where the similarities stop because the approach of Alberta has been so drastically different compared to the approach of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I looked at the issue of jobs. We looked at the issue of education and health care spending. We looked at issue of infrastructure spending. Alberta has injected more money into infrastructure spending to make their community stronger and also to create jobs. Newfoundland and Labrador has actually cut back on their

infrastructure spending, which is not the thing to do during a time of financial crisis because we know what's happening. Alberta is calling their budget a job's plan. That's not the direction at all this government is going in. We know what this government is doing is cutting jobs. What's the result of cutting jobs? More unemployment.

We do have a revenue problem in Newfoundland and Labrador that's not only revenue based on the price of oil. We have a revenue problem based on the fact that we don't have enough people working. There's been nothing done by this province to look at growing the population. We do not have a population growth strategy. People are talking about having to leave because of the high rate of unemployment, because of a budget that lacks vision. A budget that lacks saying: We're all going to work together. We're going to pull ourselves through together on this. That is what's missing in this budget.

It's not just about feeling good. It's not just about giving people a false sense of hope, but it's actually about having a plan that will put people to work, that will diversify the economy and that will give people a sense that they are a part of the solution. That's what Alberta did. Newfoundland and Labrador did the opposite of that.

I'd like to look at the wages. In Alberta, their minimum wage is at \$11.20 which is the second-highest province in the country. The NDP government in Alberta has committed to increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2018. It's a responsible, doable raise in minimum wage, gradual, here we are in 2016. So they're going to raise it to \$15 an hour by 2018. Now let's compare that to what this government is doing in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Newfoundland and Labrador minimum wage is \$10.50 and it's the second lowest in Canada. Although a lot of our cost of living is much higher in many ways when you look at the cost of food in Newfoundland and Labrador, particularly in Labrador.

Also the budget expects – and this again we can find on page 5 of the budget. The budget expects that real wages, compensation of employees to

decline by 22 per cent over the next five years. That's a scary figure.

So, in fact, Alberta is going to generate more jobs. They're going to increase the minimum wage. Newfoundland and Labrador is cutting jobs. They're not making any promise at this point for the increase in minimum wage, although the cost of living has gone up significantly. People's buying power where they have to pay their rent and their car payments and put food on the table and pay their heat and light, and their cable and their phones, those are all necessities. That in fact is not going up. There's nothing in this budget that says they are going to aim to help increase minimum wage in the province, but actually the opposite of that.

Newfoundland and Labrador in this budget – in the Liberal's budget – says and the Minister of Finance has said that the budget expects that real wages, the compensation to our employees, will decline by 22 per cent over the next five years. That's not growth. That's not something that will help us weather the storm because that's really what government should be doing.

Government should be shoring up the private industry. Government should be shoring up our public service to help people weather this storm. What they have done is they've done an accounting exercise. It's a knee-jerk reaction that we have such incredible debt and so what we can only do is just really choke the people. We can do our P3 plan, which is picking people's pockets, so that somehow we get to a balanced budget.

To what end? I keep saying, Madam Chair, I've asked that a number of times, to what end? If we cannot strengthen our people, if we cannot strengthen the public services that people need in order to be able to go forward, then what is this budget doing. This budget has no vision. This budget has no commitment to the people, that it will help the people weather this storm.

If we look also at the area of fair taxes. Alberta has no new taxes or fees in this budget except a carbon levy. They've also done a progressive carbon levy rebate of \$300 per adult. Now, I know Alberta is much more resilient financially because they didn't have the same debt load and they also had saved. They saved money over the

years from their oil industry. They've increased the top income tax rate from 10 per cent to 15 per cent and the corporate tax rate from 10 per cent to 12 per cent in 2015.

What the Conservatives did, who are part of the architects of the mess that we're in right now, is they cut a number of those taxes.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MS. ROGERS: Oh yes, we know that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: We know they were part of making this catastrophe that we face right now. However, what we have to do is strengthen the people, strengthen our public service, make sure that people can get back to work, make sure that people are able to survive financially, and also to build our province. Because if we don't do that, what is it that we have? We have a government who's gone line by line by line and have not come up with a vision to help us weather this storm and to help us strengthen our province and our economy.

This government instituted regressive tax measures of \$629 million, including HST, gas tax, RST, deficit levy – although that's been amended – and fees.

CHAIR: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member her time for speaking has expired.

MS. ROGERS: Madam Chair, I look forward to standing again to speak to this.

Thank you very much.

CHAIR: Order, please!

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Stephenville – Port au Port.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FINN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak this evening. For those tuning in at home and for those who may be listening right now, we're discussing Bill 14, An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act. I guess to kind of deviate from that a little, essentially we're discussing our temporary deficit reduction levy.

I want to preface for a moment, just to put this into context. I'll certainly come to the figures around the levy. I only have a short 10 minutes to speak. I wish I had longer and I believe I certainly will throughout the course of the evening.

However, it's important to mention the bill itself, but in order to give a bit of context behind the necessity of this bill and this piece of legislation – certainly not one that we're proud of to introduce in the House this spring sitting. There have been many pieces of legislation we have been proud to introduce. Just this afternoon and this evening the victim surcharges, as well as the *Highway Traffic Act* among others, we're certainly proud to endorse. This one being a bit more difficult, and as I think the Members opposite mentioned, perhaps a lightning rod, if you will.

I don't believe we'd be at the point to introduce this bill had we not inherited 12 years of deficit. I want to give credit where credit's due, and I believe I've done that before. I certainly have the utmost respect for all the Members opposite. I honestly do. From the bottom of my heart, I have the utmost respect for every Member over there for the job they've signed up to do. I will not personally attack them. I have yet to do that. That's not my intention, but there are some decisions they've made for which I have a lack of understanding and some limited respect for.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. FINN: I've yet to heckle any of you, as well, by the way. So I'd appreciate it, as you listen here, and we'll get into some figures.

The Member for Cape St. Francis just mentioned, of course, per capita, the poverty rates. That we were at some of the lowest in the country and that sort of thing. Now we've turned a corner, if you will – and certainly so.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy, what a great strategy the Members opposite put in at the time. There's a lot of good things that they did do. Again, the Member for Topsail – Paradise, the Member for Ferryland the other evening – the Member for Topsail – Paradise, the official Leader of the Opposition, on Thursday evening, I believe, rhymed off all the investments they made year after year after year dating back to 2003, all the way on through. So be it, I've given credit where credit is due. Name a school you shouldn't have built. Name a hospital you shouldn't have built. I can't; I certainly can't.

What I'll turn back to is some decisions that they did make. I want to specifically reference them in terms of some of the tax breaks we've seen over the years. The Member for Cape St. Francis, the blame game backfired. The choices you made, that's sad. Those were direct quotes from all of 10 minutes ago. The blame game backfired.

Well, I'm going to be here to accost some blame. Again, I've said it before. We're not playing any games here. We introduced a bill last week to borrow \$3.4 billion, the highest amount we've borrowed in our provinces history. So there are no games here. There's certainly blame to be put around on either side and here, there and everywhere, but the choices we've made, that's sad. Well, we weren't left with many choices, okay, and this is a direct result of some of the tax decreases that took place during the years the Opposition was in power.

I'm going to quote them again, because these are certainly important figures to note. In 2007, the highest earners in our province were being taxed at a personal income rate of 16.5 per cent. It dropped 1 per cent going into 2008 to 15.5 per cent. By 2010, it was down to 13.3 per cent. Now, in that same three-year span, we saw the elimination of the retail sales tax on insurance, we saw the elimination of that tax as well and, meanwhile, our lowest income earners, with exception to a reduction of 1 per cent going into '08, the lowest earner brackets remained the same.

I just want to point it out because it is important to note we have now brought our highest income earners back to the levels they were prior to

2007. In fact when it comes to income taxes – and this one is noteworthy as well because we’re talking about being competitive with Atlantic Canada. I have a document here; no trouble tabling it. I can quote for you specifically that any taxable income level up to \$60,000 of taxable income – that’s not gross income, taxable. Let’s assume a gross income for someone with a taxable of \$60,000 maybe around \$63,000, \$64,000. We are less than Nova Scotia, less than PEI, and, with the exception of New Brunswick, we are in the difference of just about \$250 in one tax bracket.

We are competitive with personal income tax levels all across Atlantic Canada. Also noteworthy is that the HST right now in Atlantic Canada, we’re tuning up to 15 per cent July 1. We have another province in Atlantic Canada doing the same: New Brunswick. And in the fall everyone will be in line with the 15 per cent. So we’re competitive all across Atlantic Canada. I just hope that message certainly doesn’t get lost.

Now, with respect to the levy – and this is certainly important because we’ve stated all along it was temporary. I believe there is nothing further from the truth and it speaks volumes when we said as soon as we have an opportunity to adjust this levy, we will, as soon as we have an opportunity. That’s why we called the measure temporary.

The word temporary doesn’t give a lot of comfort to the citizens of this province. I completely respect and understand that. I completely do. I can only ask that you bear with us, as the first attempt we had to reduce the levy, we certainly did.

To put it into context, the levy starts at \$51,000 a year, taxable income. Anybody who makes \$51,000 a year, makes roughly \$28 an hour and their levy from \$51,000 to \$55,000 – you’re making between \$28 and \$30 an hour – your \$100 levy this year divided over 26 pay periods or even half a year, either way 13 or 26, equates to about \$3.85 per pay period.

Now, I’m not a fan of taking \$3.85 from anyone, supposing it from the Member for Fogo for a cup a coffee – \$3.85. Am I still taking money from your pay cheque? Yes, absolutely we are, but to put into context where the levy lies.

As we progress up the scale, when you get to \$61,000 a year of taxable income – I repeat the word taxable; this is not gross income we’re talking about – you’re looking at about \$11.54 per pay period. We get up a little higher, anybody making \$66,000 to \$71,000 – these are citizens of our province that make approximately \$36 to \$38 an hour. These individuals will pay \$15.38 per pay cheque for their levy.

Then we get up to the \$71,000 range, you’re looking at about \$20 a pay period; \$76,000 range, you’re looking at about \$23 per pay period. These are adjustments that aren’t going to be easy for anyone. We completely understand that, but just to put into context the exact figure that you’ll pay.

Now, we come to \$80,000. He’s the interesting note because we’ve been hearing all along that we should have done things a bit differently and taxed the higher brackets. I wish to quote an article written by David Cochrane: Tax the rich? There just aren’t enough of them.

In his article – of which, by the way, he sat down with the Department of Finance and some of the officials there to obtain information with respect to the tax filers in our province, and this is exactly where he got his information from. “There are just over 50,000 people in the province who earn more than \$80,000 a year.” Those 50,000 people are going to pay anywhere from \$26 per pay cheque upwards to \$35 per pay cheque, if you’re making over \$100,000. The rest of this is spread amongst 374,000 people in the province. That’s the rest of the people who pay the remaining tax in our province. Noteworthy is that 74 per cent of people in this province will not pay a levy.

This measure is a very difficult measure to implement right now. I can only tell you we are looking towards our future. You’ve over there talking about seniors – I know my time is running short. You’re over there talking about the burden we’re putting on people right now.

I will tell you. We are spending more on debt servicing than we are on education. We spend 40 cents of every dollar on health care. Our aging population right now, the demographics are going to balloon. They’re going to balloon to an

extreme that if we are not prepared financially, we will never be able to handle it. We'll never be able to provide the level of health care needed to the people of our province. We're taking measures now that you didn't take the opportunity to make when you had 12 years to do so.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

I remind the hon. –

MR. FINN: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Order, please!

The Chair recognizes the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

That was an interesting 10 minutes, as usual. I'll be honest about something here. Do you know what? I've been sat here all evening under e-cigarettes and all the things and you almost feel in the doldrums. You're there listening to everything and it's an important topic, but you're sat back, taking it all in. So you need someone to get up to kind of get your juices going to get you back on your feet again to feel alive.

When I listen to comments like that, how someone got up on prepared text, whoever made it up for you, and bantered about the good points of the levy and cherry-picked again – you cherry-picked the levy. You've made improvements, I congratulate you. You cherry-picked how much it's going to cost a pay cheque. Did you take the insurance tax out? Did you take your gas tax out? Did you factor everything in or did you just take the levy?

Taking these numbers, we all have them. I have the same sheet you have. I respect you've made improvements, but I have a problem when you get up in this House and you talk to the camera –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. PETTEN: You talk to the camera and you cherry-pick. I have to say – well, in the meantime I guess I'll give you thanks for getting me alive again. That's a good thing anyway.

Madam Chair, speaking of this tax, the minister stated earlier 74 per cent of our residents are no longer going to fall under the levy. I think that's an alarming statement. I guess it draws into question again why you even went down that road in the beginning to touch that 74 per cent. As the list goes on, we have lots of emails we can read and people, even with this adjustment, these levies on this budget is having a detrimental impact with or without these changes.

The question that rises now – and I just heard the Member get up and we'll hear other Members get up too. They'll point fingers and all that. That's fair game. I understand that. That's part of politics and that's what you expect. It's getting more and more difficult every day to listen to that criticism, whether it's right or wrong. You earn your criticism, I guess, good or bad.

When I'm looking across the way and I hear those comments, it's an integrity problem going on across here. You just have to flick on the radio, flick on the news, we have the top five stories and every one of them questions integrity. So who are you guys to be lecturing us? Seriously, at our worst times, we never had that much.

I'll point out something else, too, I heard opposite –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. PETTEN: And I sat quietly, by the way, when it was said.

You were pointing out about – I heard comments come across the way, oh, when you were there, it was bad. I'll say this again and I want to point out again. I've been around this party for a long time. I was not in this Chamber, but I was close to this party during a lot of rough times. Once again, they were pockets of groups of people. It was the public sector, it was the fishermen and it was the media I'll go to on Bill 29. Every one of those issues was centered

around core groups. This budget affects every single person in the province.

So when you point over here again – you can make blame all you want, that's fair game, but when you do the pointing game, I question sometimes – we faced, as a party, as a government, certain hot-button issues and groups of people. Trust me; you're facing it from all ends of her.

As Members who get up and my colleague got up and said it – I went up to the local cleanup on Saturday. We done the cleanup and went up and there was a crowd at the stadium. It was unbelievable the number of people that came up to me – I was there with my wife and daughter, and it actually got to the point that I just spent my time just one after another after another. That's fine, I don't mind that, but their topic again was the budget and aspects of it, which is fine.

One of the most passionate people to come up – and my colleague for Cape St. Francis pointed out about the bounce in your step. It was ironic. He came up to me and he was very passionate. He moved home two years ago. He moved his family home, it was all kinds of promise and he was happy to – which is all a great story. Then he was there, but I've got no hope left. What are we doing here? Every sense of hope has been sucked out of me by this budget, but the government, by the messaging. When he said it I said that's strange you'd say that, because that's basically what I keep saying.

I'm not saying we're not in a financial crisis; I never said that. I do feel on a day-to-day basis when you get up and you think about it and you sit down, it's a down feeling. It's a feeling over everybody. The economy is starting to become depressed and we haven't even implemented our budget measures. Wait until the insurance kicks in July 1. As you all might recall, last week the gas tax was going on, passed through the House. I sensed there was going to be some outcry, we saw it. The insurance tax, we'll see it. The levy when it kicks in, you'll see it. Your income tax, you'll see it.

This is just going to be one thing after another – wait until the winter comes and heating bills go up, on top of everything, wait until the

Christmas season hits. Unfortunately, as individuals, it doesn't register with most people until it hits them. But this guy really hit home to me. I said it's funny about it; I've said that in the House I don't know how many times. I should have counted them, but I've done it a lot of times.

Because there are times I feel like that. And should I feel that way? Maybe I should; maybe I shouldn't. Maybe I should be out spreading good news, and I'd like to be able to be that way because there was a time not too long ago that everything was good. We were feeling good. That feeling is gone. Unfortunately, it's a sad statement, but it's true.

To get to the insurance tax – we talk about the levy, we talk about the levy, and we talk about gas tax. July 1, the vast majority of people will get their insurance renewals. So if there is any luck for ye at all, I'd say you'll be lucky to be out of the House. I think the public will, when they get their insurance renewals in the next week or so – and I'll be getting my own, like I'm sure a lot of ye will too – it is going to be big jolt.

There is going to be some increases, no doubt, plus insurance on it. There don't be a lot of talk about it and I make a point every time I get up to bring it up because I think it's very important. It's probably not talked about a lot because it's been overshadowed by the – the levy has took over a lot of our conversation, and rightfully so. But there are other measures – this budget, you can look anywhere, you can pick anything out of this budget and go on forever on.

We've been so consumed as a group about the levy and the other things. I keep saying about the insurance tax; it's a huge issue. I think that July 1 there is going to be a lot of public outcry. It's something that you guys have to face as a government on top of everything else.

I want to go back and I keep saying it and I will continue on because I believe it's very important. It's very important – the feeling – I guess consumer confidence. I've always said about the bounce in your step. You don't have to go too far to see the effect this is having on consumer confidence. That's not a party or criticism of any one.

If you go out to the Avalon Mall or you go out to the store, you go talk to a car dealer, you go talk to a home builder, every single one of them will tell you the same thing. It's happening now and we haven't seen the effects of the budget. It's unimaginable I guess what you're going to see as the fall progresses and things don't improve. Then you have next year. You have a lot of investments; you have a lot of people with money tied up, everywhere really.

We, not so long ago, had a booming economy. People were spending money and they were planning for the future. A lot of big developments now – if you go look you see a lot of subdivisions, a lot of developments, you'll see they're slowed back. The site work is done, the curb and gutters in, but there's nothing happening. I've seen it throughout Mount Pearl, St. John's and up in CBS; I've seen those areas.

That's just housing. There are a lot of other developments; other proposals being done that are also being stagnated. That list will only grow as times goes on because right now they're only going on speculation. People are pulling back instantly because – lacking consumer confidence. This will get bigger. As time goes on, this will become a bigger problem. My fear is as the full budget starts to have its effects, which could take – well, you know, it'll kick in another few months, but you're looking at six or eight months. This time next year I expect our economy will be flattened.

Revenues in government will be down because people are not going to be spending. It's going to have a trickle effect on everything. Consumer confidence does spur your economy.

We'll have lots more time to speak on this as my time runs out. I'll be back.

Thanks.

CHAIR: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: I remind the hon. Member his time for speaking has expired.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I, too, want to have a few words tonight. It's hard to sit over here being lectured by the Members opposite and not be able to react.

This bill that we're debating now is about the levy. I'll start my remarks by saying that we've heard our residents, our constituents loud and clear as well. Contrary to what people opposite may say, we're not afraid to go back to our districts. I go back every weekend and I engage in conversations.

Nobody likes the levy. Nobody likes to have this levy imposed on them. We had several discussions of course around the caucus table which included the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands at the time.

We looked at different ways to how we could possibly make this better and we had several discussions – and the deficit that we were dealing with. When the time and the opportunity presented itself and the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, after several discussions with her federal counterparts and along with the Premier, did find some extra funds. We were able to adjust the levy from what it was in the beginning. Of course we would have liked to have seen the levy gone all together. Absolutely, but we have to deal with reality. We have to be responsible. We didn't cause the problem but we have to fix it.

Moving the threshold from \$20,000 up to \$50,000 – and my colleague, the Member for Stephenville – Port au Port has really conveyed that well, what it means. You know what, given the situation, we were pleased with that. We would like to see it gone all together.

I've heard the conversation around the table many times, which included the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands, that if we could get the threshold up to \$50,000 we could live with it. We could live with it.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's still temporary.

MR. LETTO: And it's still temporary, that's right.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. LETTO: I have to say, sure, we would like to have seen it gone, but when we can improve it we will, and we did. It's still temporary. We will improve it further as time comes on and we find new opportunities to reduce that.

We have reduced it, and we have increased the threshold to \$50,000. I won't go through the same figures that my colleague, the Member for Stephenville – Port au Port said. He's given out all the numbers and the figures, so I need not do that.

I want to have a couple more words on the – the Member for St. John's Centre, every time she gets up she talks about comparing us to Alberta. Well, I'm going to tell you a little story about Alberta. When I came into this House of Assembly I said I would not bring my family into this, but I'm going to tonight. I'm going to get a little personal, and forgive me if I do.

I'm going to tell you a little story. Last year my son, who lives in Edmonton, his wife and three little grandchildren came home. They came back to the island to work, both had good jobs. They came back on New Year's Day, I think it was. Both of them had good jobs here in the city and were quite prepared to stay, but as time went on they saw that things were getting more difficult and they couldn't stay.

It was not because of the economy in Newfoundland and Labrador, the reason they couldn't stay. The reason they couldn't stay is because the economy was so bad in Alberta that they couldn't sell their house they had in Edmonton. A brand new house worth \$700,000, they couldn't sell it, because the economy was tanked in Alberta.

For the Member for St. John's Centre to get up and talk about how great things are in Alberta. Well, I can tell her, because I witnessed it – and now they're back in Edmonton – that it's not that great in Alberta, no more than it is anywhere else in the country today. It's not because of the levy in Alberta; it's because of the commodity prices.

I see it every day. Every time I go back to my district I see it. The commodity prices have killed this economy. Until we get off the reliability on non-renewable resources, we are at the mercy of the economy. I see it every time I go back to my district.

Wabush Mines is shut down because of the economy and the low prices in iron ore. So don't try to lecture me on how good things are in Alberta when I've witnessed it, I've seen it. I've had a personal experience with it. So don't lecture me on how good things are in Alberta because they are not good in Alberta, no more than they are in Newfoundland and Labrador. We've just decided to deal with it in a different way. Time will tell, Madam Chair, that we will be the winner in this one – time will tell.

AN HON. MEMBER: We're going to be the winner.

MR. LETTO: Yes, we will be the winner, because we're dealing with it responsibly. We're dealing with the mess that's been left with us. We're dealing with it. We're dealing with it in a responsible way and the best way that we can.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. LETTO: I don't see any suggestions from the other side, what to do. All they can tell us is we shouldn't have done this, we shouldn't have done that, we shouldn't have done something else.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LETTO: I don't see any suggestions of what we should do.

AN HON. MEMBER: You're not listening.

MR. LETTO: Oh, I'm listening. All I hear is lecture on what we shouldn't have done and how we're going to kill the economy in Newfoundland and Labrador. I don't see any suggestion from the other side on what we should have done differently. It's all the right choices is all they say. It's all the right choices.

Well, we made our choices. Unfortunately, they're not good, but they're choices we've had to make to deal with the mess that we've been left with. They talk about the blame game. The blame game is no longer a story.

Well, I can tell you it is a story because it's reality. It is the blame game. We've been left with a mess. We have to deal with it. We've made our choices and we'll live with them, and we'll live with the consequences. We're not in this work as a popularity contest. We're in this looking at the long term for our sons and daughters and grandchildren who want to stay here.

My son and his children would love to have stayed here, but they couldn't because of the great Alberta. That's where they had to go back to. Not because they couldn't stay here. It was because they couldn't carry another \$700,000 mortgage and they couldn't give away their home. That's why they went back, because the economy wasn't there to support it.

Madam Chair, I could go on and on. I cannot sit down without having a few words on the fixed link and the feasibility study because if I did, my conscience wouldn't allow me.

We keep hearing people talking about we have no diversification plans. We have no diversification in this budget. I don't hear you from the other side, but I can guarantee you the study is a diversification, yes –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. LETTO: – because the fixed link across the Strait of Belle Isle is great for the future of this province, not only for Labrador but for the Island portion as well. They stand to gain more from it than anybody else, probably in the country.

So every time we try to do something that will promote diversification – sure, we're not going to see the benefits by doing the study but we will see the benefits after the study is done and we can find a way to build the fixed link across the Strait of Belle Isle.

Madam Chair, my time is running out. Hopefully, I'll have a chance to get up again before the night is over. It's only so much you can take without being provoked to give the real truth.

Madam Chair, thank you for your time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm glad to be able to stand and speak to Bill 14. Of course, this refers to the levy. There are many things about this budget, and this is just one piece of it. I would say, Madam Chair, that I will be taking this opportunity, and I will be taking every opportunity I can to speak to this bill and to speak to the budget in general. I would recommend, certainly to Members opposite, that they may want to go on a coffee run, get their slippers and get nice and comfortable because we're going to here for quite some time as far as I'm concerned.

Madam Chair, I have to say, ever since we started talking about this budget I have done my very best to be straightforward about it and to be respectful of my former colleagues and everyone in this House. None of us are perfect but I've certainly done my best to keep it professional and so on.

I can tell you one thing, Madam Chair, I am not going to sit in this House of Assembly and hear yarns about things that happened and things that were said that are inaccurate. I'm certainly not going to do that, I can guarantee you that. I could tell many a yarn. If I wanted to go down that road, I could tell many a yarn with many people about how they felt about this budget, but I'm not doing it.

I'm not going down that road because I have respect for the Members of this House and I'm not attacking people personally. I'm not going down that road, but I will say this, to suggest that I said if we were to raise the levy to \$50,000 I'd be okay with it. Really! Where did that one get dreamed up? The vast majority of my constituents make more than \$50,000. This

announcement did nothing, little to nothing for many of the people I represent. Now, I'm glad there were some people who did benefit. There are people in my district who did benefit and I'm glad they benefited.

Yes, I say to the Minister of Fisheries, make your notes. You got your big aha moment. Yes, make your notes, fine.

There are many people in my district who did not benefit from this announcement, or they benefited very, very little. I'm glad for the people who did benefit. I'm glad it happened. I support it. I will say, though, there was certainly no discussion that I was aware of that any of this was going to happen, I can guarantee you that. That didn't happen either. That just came out of the blue somewhere.

If there were discussions going on it certainly wasn't shared with me and it certainly wasn't shared with the caucus, I can guarantee you that. I'm not saying there weren't discussions that happened at the Cabinet level, but nobody knew it. Even if I had known it, it would not have made a difference because the vast majority of my constituents are still stuck with the levy and every other tax that we can come up. The cumulative effect on the people of my district is going to be devastating, and not just the people in my district but the people of all the districts when you look at the cumulative effects of all this taxation.

I stood in this House time and time again and I have said – and I'm saying what the people are saying – we understand we are in a tough financial situation. Nobody is denying that. There is nobody denying it. We all know that. Everybody expected that there were going to be tough times, we expected there would be cost-cutting measures and we expected that government would have to raise revenues. Everybody knew that. Everybody was expecting some degree of increase, but it's a matter of degrees. It's the cumulative effect on people. That is the big issue.

There are also issues with education and so on which I could get into, and I will when I speak another time. One of my maybe 10 or 15 or 20 times or however long, how many times I'm going to speak.

AN HON. MEMBER: Oh yes, as many as you need.

MR. LANE: As many as I need, absolutely.

I will say the salient point in all this that I've heard from my constituents is the cumulative effect of all the taxation. When the Government Renewal Initiative took place and when those sessions took place in different parts of the province, they were done on a regional basis.

Certainly, I did one. As an MHA, I did one in my district. Granted there wasn't a big crowd of people who came, but the people who came, we went through the exercise. I did attend one in the St. John's West area as well. Sat in, went around to the tables, as did the minister and so on. It was all good stuff. I applauded it at the time. I still applaud the concept. I absolutely do, nothing wrong with it. It's the right thing to do.

The problem is that if you listen to what the people were telling you, sure, there was somebody who said, do you know what? We might have to raise gas tax. That's a way we can raise revenue. Guaranteed someone said that. I know people said that. Someone said we might have to raise income tax. That was said. Somebody said do you know what? Maybe we need that HST increase that you promised you weren't going to do it because it was as job killer and so on. Maybe you're going to have to go back on that and increase the HST. That was said. I'm not denying that. That was absolutely said by people.

I can guarantee you there was nobody, that I heard at least, who stood up and said let's raise the HST. While we're at it, let's raise gas by 16½ cents and tax that. Let's tax insurance companies, raise that. Then after we tax the insurance companies, then we're going to put 15 per cent on the tax that you're going to pay on your insurance. Let's introduce a levy, let's up the income tax. Let's up every fee that exists and let's create a whole bunch of new fees.

Nobody – I challenge anybody on the other side to get up and point out where somebody said to do all these things and do them all at once. I can guarantee you it didn't happen. It did not happen. To suggest that we're only doing what

the people told us, I think it's disingenuous to say that. It really is.

Yes, someone said do this, someone said that, but nobody said do all of it the one time. Again, that is the problem. We know we're in a tough financial situation as a province but there is no point – I've said it before and people have said it. There's no point in saving the province from financial ruin while at the same time you're going to place its residents in financial ruin. That's not going to work, and that's all people are saying.

I will say again, it is still not too late. It is still not too late. We had the budget vote. So what? You're the government, come in tomorrow – well, maybe not tomorrow because we'll probably still be here, but the next sitting once this bill is decided, come in with a few amendments. That's all anybody is saying. Just be reasonable. It doesn't have to be an us and them; this doesn't have to be an us and them thing.

I know tonight on the e-cigarettes it was like – and Bill 1. You make suggestions, whatever, and it's almost like well no, no, no, we can't make any changes. We can't make any changes because we don't want to be seen as giving in or whatever. We can't do that. So we're going to just push it on through as is. That's what we're going to do. We're going to push it on through as is.

It seems like we're doing the same thing with the budget. I don't understand why, and it's not me. I'm not the one saying this. It's what the people are saying. That's what the people are saying. That's what they're saying. That's absolutely what they're saying.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs, he has an awful lot to say. He really does. Yes, he absolutely does. He can go ahead and say it but I'm not going to be bullied by anybody, I can tell you that. I'm not going to be bullied or intimidated.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. LANE: Now that might be the modus operandi over there but it's not working on this guy, I can tell you that. It's not going to happen – not going to happen.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. LANE: Yes, I did vote for the bill. I say to the minister, I did vote for Bill 29.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. LANE: I did vote for Bill 29, and I stood up in this House after the fact. Well, I tried to get it changed. Then we know what happened. I stood up in this House when we had the new bill and I admitted that I voted for Bill 29. That's one of the biggest mistakes I made. When I cut the puppet strings I said, never again will I just go along with the crowd for the sake of going along with the crowd and toe the line. I will do what I think is the right thing to do. Voting for this budget in its current form is not the right thing to do and I'm not supporting it, and neither are the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Now that's the bottom line. That's the bottom line.

I would say, Madam Chair, there are many things in this budget that need to be discussed – many things – and that could be as it relates to this bill here, the levy, which we'll be talking about, the gas tax, the HST, the education cuts that were totally unnecessary. All of these things we can talk about and we will talk about as the night goes through.

I intend on standing up as many times as I need to, to get the message across. It's not personal. It's not personal with me.

AN HON. MEMBER: No, b'y.

MR. LANE: No, it's not. I have nothing to gain by this, not a thing –

CHAIR: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member his time for speaking has expired.

MR. LANE: – only to do what was right.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BYRNE: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

If a visitor were to come into the gallery without having any exposure or past experience to the debate that is occurring tonight, I think the visitor might come to the conclusion that there are two very stark realities and two very stark differences of opinion about the circumstances of our province right now. The hon. Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands repeated again, and again, and again, as if it were internalized to be true and unavoidable that we are in an incredibly tough financial circumstance.

There seems to be a message that is easily spread by anyone who stands in his place and expresses the point of view that we are in an incredibly tough financial circumstance and action, Madam Chair, is the order of the day. But beyond that, that's where the commonalities end. If a visitor to this Chamber were to listen to the debate here tonight – and quite frankly, the debate since April 14, since the budget day – you'd come to the conclusion that there's really absolutely no certainty that we're in a tough financial circumstance. Because if you look to the opinions that have presented by the Members of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, and to the Members of the New Democratic Party, the other Opposition Party, you would come to the conclusion very quickly that the solution here can be no tax increases – I'm very concerned, Madam Chair, what you're pointing to the Member for Mount Pearl – there seems to be another message going on here. We'll leave that to another time.

But, Madam Chair, if you were to rely on the debate and the discussion that occurred, you'd come to the very obvious conclusion that while we're in a very dire financial circumstance, there can be no tax increases – according to the Opposition – there can be no program cuts, no budgetary changes to programming. And I guess

you'd have to come to the conclusion, because there really hasn't been much of a discussion about this, the answer to this is simply to borrow. All you have to do is borrow. We'll just whistle past. We'll think of a better day. We'll think happy thoughts. Borrow, borrow, borrow, borrow and whatever happens, we'll just leave it to the kids to resolve because that's what we do. That's what our generation does.

The generation that's coming forward will make a very passionate plea and an argument that we are the generation that has poisoned the water. We are the generation that has polluted the land. We are the generation that has destroyed the atmosphere. We are the generation that has destroyed the future generation in terms of the environment. They make a very strong and passionate case about this.

Madam Chair, you'd also have to come to the conclusion that simply borrowing and borrowing and borrowing without ever reflecting on any sort of reality that, at some point in time, somebody is going to have to start paying that bill.

Well, you'd come to the conclusion as well, Madam Chair, there is not much of an eye, not much of a leadership, being viewed towards the future. Because if you have zero tax increases, you have zero program budget cuts, how exactly do you solve this incredibly tough financial circumstance the Members opposite keep referring to? They appear to understand we are in an incredible financial circumstance. They appear to understand that this year alone, without any mitigation whatsoever, we would have accumulated an additional debt load of \$2.7 billion. If we were to keep going without any mitigatable action, we would increase the total debt load of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador from a little under \$14 billion to just over \$27 billion in six short years.

So, Madam Chair, what this debate here tonight is all about is not about the levy, per se – it is about that – but really the identification is: Is there actually a problem that needs to be resolved? Because any visitor to this Chamber would come to the conclusion, there really is not a problem, if you listen to what is being voiced on the floor of this Chamber. Because there should be no tax increases, there should be no

budgetary cuts, and there is no need whatsoever to borrow any money and worry about the future generation. It's status quo, whistle past and hope that things work out. Because that's what we've done, that's what the previous administration, that's what the PCs did before.

Do you know what? It doesn't work. If there is not that recognition or realization that it doesn't work, I tell you what, any time that the Opposition wants to stand up and say, oh and by the way, we will reverse every decision that has been taken in the first 100 days of forming a future government, if that indeed is the will of the people, I haven't heard that once. Not once. I have not heard any Opposition Member, it's leadership, whether it be from the NDP or the PCs, say, you know something, we will revert taxation back to the 2014-2015 levels. No questions asked. I have not heard any Opposition Member say, you know those program cuts that we're so angry about, in the first 100 days of taking office of a future government, we'll reverse every one of those decisions.

The NDP, for example, has called for the resignation of the Premier of the province – and guess what? That would trigger an election. By law, if that were to occur, there would have to be an election within one year. So that bears a responsibility. That bears a responsibility on the part of the Opposition. Come forward with your platform right now. Be honest. So you wanted clarity about whether or not there's a problem and what the Opposition would do about that problem, come forward with their proposed budget in reply.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

Order, please!

MR. BYRNE: You don't see that happening, Madam Chair. Do you know why? Because they're whistling past, they just simply want to just forget about their responsibility that they have a \$2.7 billion dollar problem.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

Order, please!

The Chair has recognized the minister to speak, and I ask Members for their co-operation.

Thank you.

MR. BYRNE: Thank you, Madam Chair; I appreciate that.

If they want to present themselves as a credible Opposition, they can start by doing the following. This year alone there is a \$2.7 billion problem. If there were no amendments, no changes that were taken through *Budget 2016*, there would be a \$2.7 billion problem on the books this year alone. How would they fix it?

Don't talk to us about some changes to the Legislature; don't talk to us about a couple of little changes about speeding tickets or a little bit of this or a little bit of that – \$2.7 billion; how would you resolve it? Would you borrow \$2.7 billion and keep income tax and taxation and program spending exactly the same? Would you cut some programs? Increase a little bit of taxes, cut some programs and borrow a little bit? If so, define what exactly that would be.

Do you know what? The way to focus this debate, the way to actually create an accountability process, the same way the government has created an accountability process, by putting the books on the table and allowing everyone to have a look and have a say and actually having the debate on the floor of this Chamber, is to actually provide transparency of where you stand. Sometimes where you sit is where you stand and where you stand is where you sit.

Madam Chair, we have not heard one word out of the Opposition as to whether or not they would dramatically increase the borrowing portfolio of the province and increase the debt load of the province in perpetuity so that generations to come would have to pay for that. They have not said they would reduce program expenditures because quite frankly they have said in no uncertain terms that any budget cuts are just a non-starter. Any revenue increases are a non-starter, except for a few little tinkering here and there.

Madam Chair, do you know what? There's a reason why they don't want to do that, because they'll be accountable. They'll actually be questioned on their judgments. They will have to stand in their place and explain to the province, to all of the stakeholders, why they chose the path that they would take.

Guess what? They've already pronounced it. Whether they admit it or not, they've already pronounced where they stand on this, and that is ignore the problem. They have not provided any constructive criticism, any alternative approach to this, but just simply say, you know something, the levy is wrong, we wouldn't do it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BYRNE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR (Warr): The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island.

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's indeed an honour to stand in this House and talk about the challenges that the people of this province are facing. The Minister of AES did say one thing that I think hit home. Everybody realizes that we do have some challenges in this province. No doubt about it, some fiscal challenges.

The thing I think he's missing here, and the thing he didn't share with people, is their solution is on the backs of the people of this province. There's no thought to this process. There's no planning. There's definitely been no consultation. That's evident in the documentation that over the next few hours I'll allude to and touch on. This part of it here is about the levy itself.

I'll just tell you a little bit about the levy, how foolish it seems to the taxpayers here. Nobody can get their head around it because nobody can understand how you can just have a head tax, where your plan is on that.

My colleague from the Third Party mentioned earlier that it was just an exercise in a calculator

on one end adding numbers and a calculator on the other end taking numbers off, and that what it appears to be people out there. If you see the letters coming in from people who have no background in economics, no understanding of the budget process but they are saying the same thing. There doesn't seem to be a plan in what we're doing here.

I just want to share something; May 23 I had a public meeting on Bell Island around this budget; May 24 I spoke in the House; and May 25 the levy got changed. I'll just read some of the excerpts of what I said in the House that day: I had the privilege last night of holding a public meeting on Bell Island, one of the parts of my community that is dramatically hit by this budget. The 300-plus fee increases were dramatic to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and particularly in my district. Radio Bell Island broadcasted to 700 listeners.

What I thought would be the ultimate discussion around the levy didn't take place, as one person got to the microphone and said it's such a foolish tax. It's such a way of punishing everybody in our society. It's such a process of having no plan, no outline of how they're going to deal with our deficit. That people just assume, somewhere along this way in the next week or two, they're going to drop it. That the Members over there will see the light of the day and they will back off and respond to the emails they are getting from their constituents, from other people in the province and from those who know about economic planning.

I give credit, maybe the people of Bell Island are a little bit more trusting or giving too much faith to the Liberal Party because they just assume they're going to take care of the people and do the right thing and reassess the levy and make tax cuts.

While all of this is being discussed, the levy isn't a priority on Bell Island because they feel the other taxes will be more detrimental. I have to give credit for 90 per cent of my population on the Bell Island part of my district; the \$50,000 change does alleviate one of their concerns. I have to give credit to the people over there that they saw something I guess the rest of us didn't see, and I know Members over there didn't see at the time because this only came

because of the pressure that was being put on people, your own constituents, and people out in the general public and, no doubt, the discussions here.

So there was a bit of vision to do that, which will impact one part of my district. Unfortunately the other part is going to take a major hit because they are in that middle income. The Portugal Cove-St. Philip's part of it and the Paradise part, they are the middle-income working people. So now they have to, in some cases, take the brunt of some of the other non-planning processes that were here.

The whole issue here is solely about not having a strategic plan about what to do. I think one of the Members across said earlier about being open and transparent and including people. Well, every piece of evidence that I have from the NLTA, from members of the media to the Federation of Students' councils, the economists to the vice-president of Memorial University, there has been no inclusion. There hasn't been any consultation. Wherever consultation took place, the Liberal administration went the opposite on the recommendations that they had made.

People have asked, well, why have consultations? I attended one of the consultations and thought it was very enlightening. There was a great discussion around the table. There were some great pieces of information given to the minister. I thought they'd take that, they'd mould it, they'd work it into existing policies to see which ones were immediate and could be implemented, see which ones that would be long term, but none of that took place.

So it gives people an opportunity to really think about what's the objective here. I thought the objective was to get financial stability and set a plan that would be positive for the people of the province and not detrimental, but that didn't seem to occur.

One of the other things that was discussed in our sitting there was around long-term planning. It wasn't that things had to change overnight, or that you had to deal with the deficit immediately. There was nobody in that room blaming the Liberal administration for the deficit

that was there. What they were saying was, you've been elected to government, now we're giving you an opportunity to set the right path forward so the people in this province can still keep the hope – that my colleague for Cape St. Francis talked about – and still be able to move the economy forward and still have the business community invest in it.

If you want to talk about one of your big pillars was diversification, a great pillar to have, a great process to move forward on; but you've also got to have an understanding of what that means and how you're going to do it, and what part of that whole pillar is going to be the driving force behind it. And none of that was shared. None of that was shared with people. So that's fine if you don't have the answers, but then ask the people who do – and that was the general public and that was the intent of your consultations, but none of that was reflective in this budget process.

I wasn't to them all, so maybe I thought I missed it. But if you look at the thousands of emails and letters that I've received, and no doubt my other colleagues have received here, not one of them talked about these are the things we suggested. They talked about things that they suggested that haven't been implemented, that would be positive, that would be a financial savings; or at least move us to the next level over the next number of years to ensure that people weren't stifled when it came to investments here, that people weren't hurt from this, and that people didn't start thinking about moving out of this province.

That's where we are right now and that's the unfortunate part about demoralizing our society now. We have students who are talking about, when they graduate, getting out right away. We have middle-aged families now who are talking about uprooting and moving. Some people are going to start again. That's how much fear has been put in this province right now.

I had one of the RNC officers outside – I spoke to him when I came in – telling me that he has added up and it will cost him an extra \$8,000 next year. He said he's just getting started. He's only into the RNC this year. He doesn't have the ability to do that. He has to change what he needs to do in life to be able to stay here. He

wants to stay here obviously. He's got a career to do that and, no doubt, one day he'll be fairly successful when it comes to his income and that, but right now he's going to struggle. That's going to have an effect on everybody else in this province, obviously.

The Minister of AES asked the question that we never told what we would do. Sure we did. We said it in our Blue Book. We said it last year. When I sat in Cabinet, we went through our budget lines and we knew that we had to make some fiscal decisions. We looked at rightsizing government spending.

Don't forget, the difference here now is we had it out there. The HST would have been implemented July 1. That would have given us an extra \$94 million to \$100 million. That would have offset some of these other major impacts that they're going to have on people. It would have ensured that people on low incomes and middle incomes would have it, that our education system would still be viable.

We talked about attrition and how we were going to do that. We'd already have so many people out, who were retiring out of the system. We would have reorganized how we offered services to people. It wouldn't be just about slash and cut and take services out of rural Newfoundland and Labrador and have that as our focus, and make people be so inconvenienced that they'll actually give up on a service because it's not going to be viable for them to get to it. Those were some of the things we had talked about.

We talked about all-day kindergarten. A very important program and a process that one day when we're ready to be able to do it, we'd put it in place. So that same amount of money would be put back either in our education system, our health care system or the reduction of one of our taxes to do that.

Under the gas tax, we talked about we would implement it over periods of time, so it wouldn't be a major impact on our society. It wouldn't stifle tourism. It wouldn't have companies saying they're going to have to get rid of machines or layoff people because that impacted what the extra costs on the fuel was going to do. They're just some of the simple off-the-cuff

ones. Not counting the process you guys had in place, the hundreds of people, maybe a thousand people or more that you got to meet with from all different backgrounds, all various parts of this province who gave you great ideas, exceptionally good ideas. Not one of them did I see reflective in that budget line.

Add in the fact there's a half a billion dollars extra money being spent – a half a billion. You're telling me that's being fiscally prudent? I can't figure that out at all. The economists can't figure it out. When I explained that to people and I took the Estimates and I had copies of it in my meeting, people couldn't believe it. They had to go down and look at it and see that, yes, signed off by the respective minister.

So we're spending more. We didn't take any prudence at the beginning. We made all kinds of promises that there was no way we were going to be able to keep it. The façade that we didn't know how bad it was, we didn't know any of those things, people don't believe that anymore. That went by the wayside when they saw what you put out as a budget. They realized then there was no planning, there was no concept.

It was a simple solution. Let's put it totally on the backs of the citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador. Let's try to push them as hard as we can. Then when they push back, we'll try to figure out which ones made the most noise and we'll try to take care of them to see if that alleviates the noise again.

I want to make it clear, again as I mentioned, the thousands of emails and correspondence from people. The people of Newfoundland and Labrador are not going to let it go that easily. They have ideas about how this province should move forward. They elected a government on a premise that they would have a plan to move this province to where it needed to go to continue the growth that we had, but to be fiscally responsible. Unfortunately, that hasn't happened. That's reflective in, no doubt, what you guys have seen in your own responses from your own constituents and what we're hearing from every other level, professional levels and from the media.

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: Mr. Chair, I'll have an opportunity to speak again before the night is out.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member that his time has expired.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's an honour for me to get up and participate in the debate again this evening on the budget. It was interesting to hear some of the comments made already. I think one of the things that makes the hair stand up on the back of everybody's head is the fact that we passed a bill here in the Legislature just a few days ago authorizing government to borrow \$3.4 billion again this year to address the mess that we have on our hands.

You know, it's interesting. I remember what the hon. Government House Leader had to say about this whole debate. It's like the guy who says, you know, I'm here cleaning up your mess, and the other side saying: oh, you're holding the mop wrong. Don't hold the mop like that. You're holding the mop wrong. Use it more this way. Mop the floor more this way. Clean up more mess this way. I say grab a mop and start mopping and help us to clean up the mess you made.

The Member for Ferryland stands up and says, oh, you hear it out in your district. The Member for Cape St. Francis said you hear people talking about it in your district. Of course we hear people talking about it in our district, the mess. It is a fiscal nightmare. We are spending more on borrowing in debt servicing than we are on all of K to 12 education and everything in the Department of Education, Early Childhood Development. More than that on servicing the debt that that crowd managed to rack up. I'm hearing a lot about that.

People say what a mess we have on our hands. I wouldn't want to be you crowd. That's what I'm hearing an awful lot of, and of course nobody likes to pay more tax, of course not, but where's the money going to come from? We're not hearing a lot of solutions.

The Member for Ferryland got up, he talked about equalization. It seems his strategy is beg and borrow I call it, because there's really not much of anything else. Go to Ottawa; see if they'll give us some more money – with your cap in your hand and go.

They talk about pride as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians at the same time advocating that somehow we go and get them to break the equalization formula. He said, who advocated for Newfoundland and Labrador? Who advocated for Newfoundland and Labrador the two occasions that they had to negotiate legitimate changes to equalization? They did nothing. There was nothing done. So it certainly wasn't them.

Then they talk about diversifying the economy, diversifying our sources of income. Under that crowd, their idea of diversifying the economy was to borrow a little bit from Scotiabank, and to borrow a bit more from TD Bank, and to borrow a little bit more from somebody else and borrow and borrow and borrow. You can't borrow your way out of this hole. It's just creating a deeper hole. They don't seem to get that.

I remember the second filibuster I participated in here in the House of Assembly when I was sitting over on the side. The first one was the time that crowd shoved Bill 29 down the province's throat, more or less, invoked closure to ram that bill through the Legislature. The second time was Muskrat Falls. Again this year, over a billion dollars, basically, we're borrowing to hand over to Muskrat Falls, a project just ridden with problems.

Not just that. Initially, they said the person who sat right here, who was Minister of Finance at the time, said there was nobody on the other side who is even intelligent enough to have a debate about Muskrat Falls. So there was no point in even having a conversation with us about it. That's what the Minister of Finance said of the

day. We weren't even worthy of a debate. People can accuse us of a lot of things but I have not witnessed that kind of arrogance since that government left office. That's what we were dealing with. We weren't smart enough to have a debate.

You can smirk over there all you want, I say to the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island, that's what he said. That's what the Minister of Finance said to the Opposition.

Then they said there would be no debate in the House of Assembly whatsoever. We are not going to do it. On Private Members' Day, a day that we know the scheduled debate happens between the hours of 3 p.m. and 5 p.m., two hours would be sufficient to debate this project that has done nothing in my view than drag us down.

Then we finally managed to convince them that, yes, it was worthy of having a debate on a project that was going to cost us billions and billions and billions of dollars and all of the arguments for Muskrat Falls were questionable. They did not do what Nova Scotia did which was to allow their public utilities board to actually do a thorough examination on whether or not this made sense.

We finally had a debate here in the House of Assembly and they put clauses into that legislation so as to prohibit us, as a people, from even going out and finding alternative sources of energy. They basically chained us to this project.

Like the minister said earlier, when that dome, that thing that they were trying to – how foolish to go and try and build a bubble over the top of a falls, a river in the deep interior of Labrador and to have that somehow stay up through the winter. No feat of engineering would accomplish that, as we saw, because it all blew down. We don't know how many tens of millions or whether it was \$200 million that that mess cost Astaldi. But when the minister of Natural Resources who sat over there, their minister of Natural Resources stood up, he said, who is going to pay for that mess? He said, oh no, the contractor will cover all the costs.

AN HON. MEMBER: Oh yeah, how'd that work out?

MR. KIRBY: We'll see how that's going to work out, Mr. Chair. We'll see when the adjusted schedule and costs for Muskrat Falls, the project that crowd shackled us to, we'll see how that's all going to turn out for the province.

Then there was, at the end, like Bill 29, they shoved it down our throats, they invoked closure; and after several days of debate, they found a way to get around continuing the debate and shut it down, and that's where we are today. The project continues to go behind schedule and cost millions and millions and millions of dollars' worth of money, and it has been nothing controversy associated with that project from day one, and a project they never wanted to have any debate on.

Now, the other thing, it's interesting, I heard some stuff over there from the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island that I never heard before about their plans for higher income taxes. He said they were going to do higher income taxes and do it further off or different taxes. I'd like to hear more about that, because that's the first time anybody said that. We have heard they would have increased the HST. We know that. Leaders of both of the Opposition parties have said they would have laid off people. The Official Opposition said they would have laid off more people. I don't know if they're talking about a hundred more people, hundreds more people, thousands more people. They haven't really said.

They said no seniors' advocate – they don't want to do that because that's a luxury, they called it. They don't want to do the feasibility study for the link to Labrador, and they don't want full-day kindergarten. So that's about \$15 million more. I don't know where you're going to get the rest. The Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island said in here one day he wanted to eliminate multigrading in the province. That's going to affect 170 classrooms, somewhere between \$45 million and \$50 million extra. So he just negated a whole bunch of everything that he's said so that we can have classrooms in the province that resemble tutoring rather than classrooms. That's one of the things that they're on the record on.

We hear a lot of criticism – don't do this and don't do that – but we don't hear a lot of, well,

constructive solutions that have real figures attached to them. Other than the HST and laying off a lot more public servants, the three things I listed off there, there's not a whole lot else that we're hearing.

It's \$1.83 billion remaining. Mr. Chair, \$1,830,000,000 is the deficit that remains, even after all this hardship, even after this budget that most of us, if given a different opportunity, would not have to initiate. We don't hear a lot of solutions, like I said.

Hopefully we can stay here long tonight. I'm interested in hearing solutions because we just have not heard any. I've certainly not heard a lot of talk about Muskrat Falls from them either. As far as I'm concerned, that's the originator of much of our fiscal problem today.

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: I remind the hon. Member his speaking time has expired.

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

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

I'm very happy to stand in the House and to continue to speak to this bill, the Liberal levy bill. As we've heard tonight, people are speaking to a much broader aspect of the budget in its entirety.

Members on the other side, I've taken time over the past two weeks to speak to the similarities between Alberta and Newfoundland and Labrador and then also the different approaches. I find it very interesting how Members on the other side, on government's side, in fact, twist and torque the words that I have spoken. I'm not quite sure why they're doing that, maybe because they feel threatened by the truth with which I'm speaking.

Never once, Mr. Chair – I never once said that they're exactly the same situation, but the similarities are that both provinces are facing incredibly devastating fiscal realities because of the sudden drop in oil and because both

provinces rely very heavily on income of oil. Of course, I've also said a number of times that Alberta is much more fiscally resilient because they don't have the same depth of debt.

Alberta may have a better chance because, in fact, what they're doing is they're harnessing the energy of all our good Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who are in Alberta and who are willing to roll up their sleeves and get to work in Alberta, doing everything in their power to make sure that those people can get back to work. Whereas, in fact, what this government is doing is cutting jobs, cutting jobs and cutting jobs. They haven't done a thing in their budget to talk about – no plan or strategy to create jobs to get people back to work.

Because part of our revenue crisis right now is the fact that we have such a high level of unemployment. And this budget, this government itself, in their very own Budget Speech talked about how their Government Renewal Initiatives, which come with measures, their grim approach – the G-R-I-M approach, in fact, is going to increase unemployment. Mr. Chair, that is not a solution.

What one would hope from the government is that the government, during this tough time, would in fact stabilize the economy. And what this government is doing is destabilizing the economy because there is no solution. All they are doing is an accountant's approach to cutting the deficit, to cutting the debt. They are not doing anything to propel people forward; they are not doing anything to strengthen the economy, to strengthen the people, to strengthen our infrastructure so that, in fact, we don't just come up with cutting, cutting, and cutting, but in fact building, which is what we have to do.

Economists the world over have said again, again and again – and I look forward to speaking to that – that austerity measures do not work in a time of fiscal crisis. We know that the folks here in the Official Opposition, when in power, that there were billions of dollars of revenue in oil, yet here we are still, with all that prosperity, in absolute crisis situation in terms of the budget. But if government has the will, government, in fact, can help us weather the storm and can help stabilize the economy. That's not what their budget is doing.

So what would we do differently? Let's take a look at a few of the things that we would do differently, Mr. Chair. We would build a budget based on values and principles. We absolutely wouldn't put everything on the table because not everything should be on the table. If government role is to strengthen private industry during these times, and strengthen our public services, it's not the time to put everything on the table. Not everything should be on the table.

We need to make sure that our people are educated. We have years ahead of us to try and get out of this debt situation that we're in, so we have to make sure people are as educated as we can possibly make them so that they are able to contribute to society. We need to make sure that our people are healthy, that they are vibrant, so that they too can contribute to our economy.

We have to build a budget around clearly, articulated values. That's not what this budget did. We do not see any clearly, articulated values. Again what we see is cutting line by line by line. We do not see an overall vision, an overarching vision that says together we are going to strengthen our communities so that they can bear the difficulties and challenges that the province faces because of the fiscal situation.

We would do what the NDP in Alberta did. Again, we are not comparing apples to apples. We know there are very great differences. What would we do? As Alberta did, we would invest in Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. We would invest in jobs. This government is not investing in jobs. This government is cutting jobs. They are destabilizing the economy rather than stabilizing the economy.

We would have replaced bogus consultations with meaningful debate and we would give citizens the information they need to make informed input. Mr. Chair, I went to some of these community consultations that this government did. What did they do? They gave people three options of where they would cut. Where this government should have been starting from is, what do you think we need in order to strengthen our economy, to strengthen our people to help us weather this storm? That should have been the starting place, not where we can cut and cut and cut without any overarching and articulated values.

We'd analyze the overall impact of the budget on the people. How is this budget going to affect people? We would put a gender lens – the gender lens was never applied to this budget. We know that was a required activity, that the Women's Policy Office should have been able to apply their gender analysis tool to the budget. That was never done. We would have put a disability lens, a youth lens, a seniors' lens. How is this budget impacting people's lives?

The more we impoverish people, the more we impoverish our communities, the further we are behind. To impoverish our own people does not make sense. To have more people unemployed, to have more people who can't afford to their medication, to have more people who can't afford their rent does not help us at all. As a matter of fact, it holds us back. What they're doing is they're squeezing the life out of people.

We've all heard people talk about maybe I have to leave because there's no hope, there's no vision on the horizon. We would have scraped the levy. We're sure that nobody in these bogus consultations that this government did said let's put a levy; let's put a head tax on everybody in the province. Nobody would have recommended that.

I would love to see where in those consultations there were people who said let's do a levy. I would love to see that. We haven't seen it anywhere online. Maybe there were lots of people who said let's do this levy. I'd love for government to prove that, to, in fact, show us where people recommended the Liberal levy.

We would have incorporated needed revenue into personal income taxes and corporate income taxes and our platform said that. That's what we said in our platform, that we would increase corporate income by 1.5 per cent to try and bring it back to levels that were not so long ago.

We would replace the doubling of the gas tax, which has a disproportionate impact on rural people and communities. Because it affects rural communities much more so than people in urban centres, and that's indisputable. We wouldn't have done that. What we would have done, we would replace that with a measured carbon tax based on polluter-pays principle and following through on a thorough public debate on the

options. We need to be talking about those things.

Now the minister announced a \$570 million infrastructure; however, the minister didn't announce \$138 million cut to infrastructure spending. So we would reinstate that, and we'd also focus on green technologies. I think I mentioned this in the House before. There's a fantastic new group here in town, in the province, called Iron and Earth. These are folks who have worked in the oil and gas industries and in the mining industries who are well-trained workers, plumbers, electricians, pipefitters, scaffolders, who have lost their work, have lost their jobs because of the drop in the price of oil, because of the drop in commodities in the minerals industry, who are willing to ply their trade, who are willing to use their expertise and their skills to get to work in the area of green technologies.

We haven't seen anything like that; we haven't seen a vision like that in our budget. These are people who want to stay in Newfoundland and Labrador. These are Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who are willing to roll up their sleeves and do innovative and creative work. There's been nothing in this budget that would facilitate that, that would encourage that. That's a shame. That's a missed opportunity.

When we look at this budget, Mr. Chair – I see my time is almost up – this budget is riddled with missed opportunities. With missed opportunities of harvesting the energy, not just the energy whether it be from the sun or the wind or our water energy, but the energy of the people, the people who are well trained and who want to work.

CHAIR: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member her speaking time has expired.

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

I'm looking forward to speaking again.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

MR. HAWKINS: Can I just have a five-second recess on that one, Mr. Chair?

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to try to temper my passion and my emotions from what I would consider to be my last rant that I had in the House on the budget that I went about 20 minutes. I know that I was very passionate about that. I am very passionate about this too, Mr. Chair.

I made a statement at that time and I'll make the statement again. All of us on this side of the House, we fully understand this was a tough budget. We had to take measures that none of us really wanted to make. I just want to clarify a couple of comments the Members opposite made tonight.

One of them we need to clarify is the fact they tend to say we did nothing with expenditures. We just increased expenditures again this year. Mr. Chair, while that is actually true, there is a real reason for that. Part of that, there is over \$400 million in new spending for debt servicing. There is in excess of \$200 million that went to the teachers' pension fund. Really, Mr. Chair, we did not have control over that expenditure.

One of the other things I also wanted to clarify. We've all heard from Members opposite that people in Newfoundland and Labrador had a bounce in their step and all that sort of thing because of the conditions the province was in. Well, let me clarify. If, for example, I knew, as an individual, that we have a \$23,000 debt per capita, I don't think I'd have a very good jump in my step. They don't point these things out, Mr. Chair.

One of the other things that is a sad commentary that we've been hearing around: It seems like status quo is acceptable. Status quo is not acceptable to this side of the House. If, in fact, we did go with the status quo and we did nothing, before the end of this four-year mandate, that \$23,000 per capita would raise to about \$54,000 per capita debt. Mr. Chair, that's not something I'm proud of. I don't know if there's anyone else in this House who would be proud of that. It's certainly not something I'm proud of.

As my good colleague said earlier, what are we doing? We're passing it on to the next generation. That's not something I want to be proud of. That's not something that I stand and was elected to do. I was elected to make responsible decisions. Unfortunately, Mr. Chair, because of the mess we're in, we've had to make these choices. They are tough choices, but we are looking at a direction we want to put this province, in going forward, that we don't make the same mistakes.

Another interesting piece of information, Mr. Chair, is the fact that if we continue to borrow and borrow and borrow at the rate that we were going – I know it's very difficult for me to get my head around it, I'm sure Members in this House on this side have difficulty as well. If we did nothing before the end of this mandate we would be paying \$2 billion a year debt service – \$2 billion a year debt service. Think about it.

A lot of people around here have been criticizing the fact that Muskrat Falls is probably going to cost us \$10 billion. You know, Mr. Chair, I would hope that with that investment there would be a return sometime, whether it's 10 years or 20 years or 30 years or 40 years. Just think about this, if we did nothing this year or we did nothing in the next three years, just think about it, every five years we will be paying in interest a Muskrat Falls. Every five years – \$2 billion a year. Now that's totally irresponsible. That's not something as an MHA or a minister that I could be proud of.

Mr. Chair, one of the other things the Members opposite keep talking about is they keep going back into their districts and talking about the fact that everybody is talking about the budget, everybody is criticizing the budget. They've also said that people on the government side are afraid to go back in their district on weekends. I don't know where that's coming from, because I believe everyone in this district, we go back.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Chair, I attended three functions on Saturday, three functions. One of the functions I attended was in the beautiful community of Twillingate – great place, I grew up there, know a lot of people. I went to an event. There were about 180 people there, and I went to practically every single table, every single table. I might have missed one or two.

One table, out of everyone I spoke to, had a negative thing to say. Just about everybody – and of course, that's the good people of Twillingate. That's just the way they are, I guess. They talked about, I cannot believe what you guys got to do. I would not want to be in your shoes. I would not want to have to make the decisions that you have to make.

Ironically, while we were attending the function, one of the waitresses dropped a glass and it broke on the floor. Somebody came up with a mop and one of the guys at one of the tables made a comment to me. He said: That reminds me of what you guys have to do. You're cleaning up the mess. I said, well, that's a good way of putting it because we do have to make tough decisions. These are decisions that we have not taken lightly and these are decisions that we had to make.

Mr. Chair, one of the other points I wanted to make – and I know my good colleague alluded to the fact that as adults we don't have a good record of looking after our environment and looking after where we are, the circumstances. We have not had a good record of looking after our finances. We haven't had a good record. It's not a good record.

I've got difficulty. How can I get my head around the fact that in the last 10 years we have \$25 billion in royalties –

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. HAWKINS: Twenty-five billion, and we had debt in half of those years, when all the money was flowing in, when all the oil money was flowing in, when all the royalties were flowing in. They were coming into our coffers and we incurred debt.

Mr. Chair, I'm hoping this side of the House will make some provisions going forward that at least before another election comes up at least every government and every person will have an understanding of where we are financially. There won't be any questions. There won't be any doubt. We won't have to wonder where we are. There will be an update that will be distributed so people can fully understand where we are.

Mr. Chair, that really concerns me because of the fact I've mentioned before, having all of those resources and all of those royalties come in. The money has been spent, yes. The infrastructure has been there, yes; however, we have to be prudent. We have to be fiscally responsible for what we're doing. We just can't spend and spend and spend and borrow in order to spend. We have to make decisions that are responsible. We have to make sure that we have the financial mechanism in place whereby we can adequately pay for the debt that we're incurring.

I know my time is going. I'll probably get a chance later on to speak, Mr. Chair. I just have to add this one, I mentioned it before. I have two grandchildren in this province and it's sad. I never, ever thought I would live in this province long enough that we would be paying more in interest than we would be paying for the education of my grandchildren and the children in this province. It's a sad situation. It's a sad commentary for this province. We must make changes to ensure this never happens again. That's important. We cannot pass it on to our children. They will not have a future. We cannot do that.

We have to make the measures. We have to take the steps to make sure we protect the future for our young people and that we have a province for our young people so they can find employment so they can have a future. I believe we can do that, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member that his speaking time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Topsail – Paradise.

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

Thank you for recognizing me this evening and giving me a chance to enter into debate on Bill 14, which is the levy bill. Mr. Chair, it's just after 10 o'clock in the nighttime. Normally, the

House would close at 5:30 p.m. or 10 p.m. Now we are beyond 10 o'clock, and I suspect we're going to be here for a long time yet debating the levy.

The levy is somewhat symbolic, as we know, because the levy is the bill and the decision, the choice the Liberal government made in this year's budget that caused the most outrage and upset by people in the province. There are other parts of the budget that also upset people because we know they had a number of, what they referred to as, revenue actions that took place in this budget.

Now, I listen to Members opposite, listen to what they say. They say we had to make changes. We had to do things. I certainly agree with that, Mr. Chair, because that's exactly what we did last year in 2015, in my first and only budget as Premier. We said we have to do things differently because the economy is changing, the price of oil is dropping and, as a government, we have to take steps to rectify the difficult circumstances we're going to face if the price of oil continues to decline. It did. That's exactly what it did.

Predictors and those who look at the oil industry around the world tried to get out ahead of it and say what was going to happen. They were wrong. They were wrong and they're still wrong. The volatility continues. Now they're all playing safe and a lot of them are saying it's going to stay down. Prices have gained some ground recently, up to about \$50 a barrel. It's something to celebrate compared to where we were in January, but it's pale in comparison to where we've been historically in recent years.

We began that process. We said we have to increase taxes. People find it sometimes amusing. They found it amusing sometimes last year. They said, hang on now. They said, Davis, what are you doing? You're going into an election and you're saying you have to reduce programs and services. You have to continue to reduce the public service because that's been ongoing since before 2010, where there has been slow and continued reduction. Slow in a way that a lot of people haven't even noticed reductions in public service, but done in a way that doesn't shock the system. Done in a way

that doesn't shock the economy, doesn't have a big, significant strike to the economy.

We were going to raise taxes and we said, yes, we have to make changes in how we're doing business. We have to find more effective ways to use taxpayers' dollars. We got to continue to work and work harder to find more efficient ways to operate line departments and agencies, boards and commissions, or commonly known as ABCs.

Even in government, we had EY working with departments, to come into departments and work with the executives and those who manage and run the departments and say: well, how can we find a more effective and efficient way to do our business, do that work? Can we do it with fewer people? Can we do it effectively and so on?

All that work was underway, and we went to an election on that. We went to an election on that to the people last fall. In comparison, we know what the other platforms were. Some of them we've heard a lot about it. I'm sure we'll hear more about it tonight because very quickly, last year in the budget the Premier went on the record and said we will not increase HST. HST is a job killer – and even went to words to say, not on my watch.

As the price of oil continued to fall – we all saw it happening. Every one of us saw the price of oil continue to fall. We talked about the difficult times ahead and the things we needed to do – not on my watch, is what the Leader of the Liberal Party went to an election on last year. He even talked about streamlining taxation and so on.

We are where we are today. The people of the province have made their choice based on the promises and the campaigns that Members opposite made. Mr. Chair, those saying you're going to do things and not doing them hasn't stopped. It has continued.

Even during recent debates right here in the House of Assembly, we've talked about the handling of the matters at Nalcor and the departure of the former CEO. We had commitments and promises from the government opposite that they're going to release and provide certain information. They

released little bits of information. They encouraged others to release information they do; yet, they go back on the commitment and the promise to release those documents.

Then the Members opposite, during Question Period, now have gotten into the habit – they're trying to use up time, I suspect, Mr. Chair, because they all stand and applaud long and hard. Every time a Member opposite, a Liberal frontbencher answers a question they applaud long and hard.

The other day the Premier gets up and talks about he's going to provide the documents right away. We asked him would he table them. He doesn't answer that. He won't do it now. He changes his position, and they applaud long and hard. Members opposite support that. Members in the caucus support it. They all voted for the budget. They stand by their leader, and they applaud long and hard when he changes his position.

That's what's happened since a year or more ago. That's what happened a year or more ago, Mr. Chair. He said he didn't hear the details of the severance until May 5. That's what he said. If you listen to him, he's probably right in what he said. He didn't know the details. It depends on what he wants to determine the details of, that's what the Premier said – the details of May 5.

Some people call that being too cute by half. That's the phrase. We've heard that before. Some use the phrase too cute by half because when you're asked the question: When did you know about the severance. The answer is I didn't know the details until May 5. Oh, so you didn't know about the severance until May 5. Well, that's not actually what he said; he didn't know the details because we find out now he did know the details on April 20.

That's not a way that the people of the province expect a government to do their work and speak to the people. When we come to the House here, and as an Opposition we ask questions of the government during Question Period, we're not just asking for our own benefit. Well, we have an interest, so we'll ask a question. That's not what it's about. We ask on behalf of the people of the province.

They have a role in government. They have a role, elected and given a role by the people and given a mandate to lead and govern. We've been given a role by the people of the province as well. Part of that role is to come to Question Period every day and asking questions for clarity and information and details on matters that are important to the people of the province, and we've been doing that.

That's where we are, Mr. Chair. Members opposite say they're going to do one thing, they do something else. Here we are today debating a levy and debating a budget when they're on the record as saying that increased taxes are job killers. It crushes the economy, is what they said. They said it's not good on the economy.

The Premier is on the record, as a matter of fact – and if I can find it here because I have a stack of material ready for debates that we're going to have over the next several hours. He talked about HST: “It will also negatively affect people on fixed incomes, including seniors, who cannot afford price increases for everyday goods and services.” So it's not just about giving you a rebate and a refund if you're a low-income earner. It's also what the impacts were on HST.

It says: “Liberals understand that this increase” – the increase in HST is what it's referring to – “will hurt consumer confidence and hurt business.” Mr. Chair, that's right out of the Liberal red book. That's a part right out of the Liberal red book of what they said was wrong with the HST. Yet, if they only implemented the HST, I know people would be quite accepting of that. I know they would, but it's everything else that goes on top of it that's causing a problem.

The levy is one. They didn't change it. By the way, if you look at the releases, when they say they changed it they didn't change it because they felt it was an important thing to do. They changed it because the federal government allowed them to do it by giving them the funding. By giving the funding back from the loan payment, by deferring the loan payment, by kicking that can down the road.

Members opposite get up here tonight, and we've heard some of it – I won't name them, because that's not the intent of tonight, but get up and they say, we got to stop putting off the

debt to our grandchildren and to our families and the people down the road. Yet, they just did that with the repayment to the federal government. They put it down the road tax free for another five years, and then pay 10 years after that. It's kicked down the road to 2022, and then for 10 years after that. So while they tell us it was wrong for us to do it, then they do part of it themselves. It's really interesting how it's wrong for us to do certain things and it's okay for them to do it.

Now, Mr. Chair, I also want to talk about tax reductions over the last 12 years. I've got a minute left in this time. What happens in this debate and while we're in committee is we get to speak for 10 minutes. We go back and forth across the House, generally is what happens. I suspect when we get later in the evening Members opposite will stop getting up and we'll get up more. When people are going to bed and they're turning off their TVs and stop watching, it will be left for us to carry the night overnight while people sleep, or most people sleep. But we're okay with that, we're going to do that.

I also want to talk about decreased taxes. Members opposite have talked about that; I suspect they'll talk about it more. I can't remember a time from my time being here in the House since 2010, or even before that. I can't remember a time when a Member from the Opposition party or the Opposition as it was at the time, the Liberal Party, I don't know if I can remember anybody in the House ever criticizing government for lowering taxes. Now, if someone over there said, yes b'y, back in 2010 I got up and I said, look, that's a wrong thing to do to lower taxes, b'y, correct me. I can't remember a time when a Member did that, and we're going to talk about more of that over the night.

CHAIR: Order, please!

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

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Harbour Grace – Port de Grave.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. P. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Well, it's always an honour to stand here in this hon. House because, as you know, we represent our constituents. Again, it's very important to recognize our constituents who put us where we are to represent them.

Well, needless to say, like all of us here in the House on each side, we hear a lot about the budget. There's a lot of concern. That's certainly a given. A lot of people are concerned about the levy, but I will talk about a big concern that continues to dominate discussion in my District of Harbour Grace – Port de Grave.

There are 15,000 constituents that I represent in my beautiful, strong District of Harbour Grace – Port de Grave. As we know – and we're going back to 2007 when there was a promise made by the previous administration in the heyday, in the golden years when we were flush with oil cash. A promise made to the people of Coley's Point Primary school, the young students there, their parents.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MS. P. PARSONS: Absolutely.

As we know as well, the student population at Coley's Point Primary is 350-plus. This school is situated in an area where population continues to grow in Conception Bay North. This school services children from Port de Grave, from Bareneed, from Shearstown, Butlerville, Bay Roberts of course and Coley's Point. It's essential. They need a new building. It's a 60-year-old-plus facility.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. P. PARSONS: Absolutely.

I want to reflect on a letter that with some research we found. This is dated back to October 30 of 2015. I just want to reflect on the date of this letter of October 30, 2015. It was just before the election that we had – a month before actually – on November 30. It is addressed to the Mayor of Bay Roberts. It's written by then Education minister, Susan Sullivan.

I will read this letter because we want to get this out. We want to get this on record: Dear Mr. Wood, I am writing you at this time to confirm

the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's commitment to the new school to replace Coley's Point Primary. To date, we have made progress in moving this project forward.

First of all, I ask, Mr. Chair, where is the progress? There's a sign, but the last time we checked students can't go to school in a sign. That was always put there.

This past summer a site for the new school adjacent to Amalgamated Academy was expropriated on behalf of Newfoundland and Labrador English school board. In addition, a floor plan and concept design has been completed and detailed design work is currently underway.

We saw the sketch, but after some research as well, the Minister of Municipal Affairs had found out that this in fact wasn't true.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MS. P. PARSONS: That's right.

It is anticipated this school will be tender ready in 2016. What year is this, Mr. Chair? It is 2016.

Attached, please find an architect's drawing depicting the appearance of the building. Again, I would like to reiterate that this project is included in government's multi-year education infrastructure development plan released in *Budget 2015* and remains a priority. Thank you for your support – and God knows there was a lot of patience – for this important project.

I want to say, again, we know that this is not simply a priority today; this was a priority when the previous administration was still in power. In three past budgets, three consecutive budgets there was money allocated for Coley's Point Primary School. Money was allocated in that budget. At the time, there was a Member, of course, on the government side. Where's the school? Where's the start for the school, Mr. Chair?

Well, as we know, the times that we're in are ugly. I'll say they are ugly, the financial time, absolutely; this is a difficult time, the most challenging time facing Newfoundland and Labrador in all of our history. It still remains a

priority because as the Member for Harbour Grace – Port de Grave District I will stand by, I will talk about Coley's Point Primary until the sod is turned on that school.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. P. PARSONS: I can't reiterate enough, I'm hearing from parents on a daily basis about Coley's Point Primary school. They're concerned about the age of the building. I just spoke with the principal, actually just this evening, and there's a concern now, of course, with changes coming to the education system, this is school at Coley's Point Primary, the property, there is no pavement, there is no asphalt at that school, so there's a concern with safety with regard to busing and transportation.

I've been to the school, I continue to go to the school often, I meet with the school council, the parents, and again, I can't reiterate enough how important this topic is. Again, I'm committed to working with our ministers. I will lobby and I will voice the concerns, like I say, until this becomes reality. All children in Newfoundland and Labrador, and in Canada for that matter, deserve to grow and learn in a healthy, modern facility. And the children of Coley's Point Primary are no exception. We have been looked over in the past since 2007, and again, in three past consecutive budgets; but like I said, there's a voice now for Coley's Point Primary here in this House of Assembly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. P. PARSONS: I also want to reflect on another matter, of course, facing the District of Harbour Grace – Port de Grave and that is the slated closure for the courthouse. It is very important. I will reiterate it's a regional system. It services about 50,000 people annually and is situated in Harbour Grace, the building itself, which is no longer being utilized because of the condition – I ask, Mr. Chair, what happened to the condition of the building?

We know it's a National Historic Site. It was constructed in the 1800s, the Harbour Grace courthouse. What investment was made in the past decade, again, when we were flush with oil royalty, when we were rich, when we were a have province – where was the investment in the

justice system situated in that region of Conception Bay North? I have to ask. It's a concern now. We hear Members opposite, rightfully so, raising their concern, but where was the concern years ago when there was money?

Now, as we know, no one is in that building because it's not safe. It was left to rot and they are utilizing an alternative building in the Town of Harbour Grace. I'm working continuously with the Town of Harbour Grace to come up with a solution as an alternative because, again, as that Member, I will voice the concerns. I will work my hardest. I am dedicated, of course, to doing the best for my constituents and to have the decision, hopefully, overturned.

The Members opposite raise questions here and rightfully so. That's their job and I respect them. I will say I do respect the Members opposite, each and every one of them. They're here for their constituents. They're good Members. They stand up for their constituents, but, again, we would be remiss not to remember the infamous, one of the longest filibusters in the history of our province of Bill 29.

Now, it's been said to me that Bill 29 didn't hit constituents in the pocketbook. I disagree because when that bill was put in place that took us back compared to third-world countries with regard to access to information. It was a secrecy bill. How much legislation was – we know Muskrat Falls was pushed through under Bill 29. Is that right?

Is Muskrat Falls hitting constituents and residents of our province in the pocketbooks? Well, Bill 29 certainly has hit us all in the pocketbooks. As we know, it was revoked. Why was it revoked? Because of the public pressure. After the dirty deeds were done, Mr. Chair, it disappeared but it did not disappear for free. It disappeared at a price tag to the taxpayers of \$1 million. There is much to reflect on.

We talk about responsible management of funds. I have to ask this – we talk of the libraries cuts and it's a shame, I will say. It's a shame that one of my libraries in my District of Harbour Grace is being closed. I'm going to meet with the library board and see what we can find as an alternative. I'm committed to doing that.

I have to ask: What about the Humber Valley Paving contract? It disappeared. Poof, gone. Again, it did not disappear for free. It disappeared at \$19 million to taxpayers. Why? Do we even know why it disappeared?

Well, it's going to be a long night. The hon. Member opposite reflected on the time. It is going for 10:30 tonight. We will be sitting a long time here in the House of Assembly, but we'll do that. We do that for our constituents and the people deserve that.

Again, I will reiterate the importance of the replacement for Coley's Point Primary school; 350 students-plus in an area with an expanding population, a 60-year old facility. Promises were made. It was in the budget. How happy was the local newspaper *The Compass* to come out and report? The parents were so happy. Yes, there's money for this school, but it did not happen.

Again, I'm committed to working with the ministers. They'll hear from me every day, which they have. They've been hearing from me since prior to the election, and they will. I'm committed to representing the constituents of Harbour Grace – Port de Grave.

CHAIR: Order, please!

MS. P. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: I remind the hon. Member that her time has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and good evening.

I'm delighted to have an opportunity to rise and take part in the debate this evening on the Liberal levy bill. It's not just about the levy, Mr. Chair. It's about everything that's wrong with this Liberal budget and everything that's wrong with this Liberal government that's spinning more and more out of control each and every day.

The theatrics you're going to witness during this debate have already started. You've got the Member for Harbour Grace – Port de Grave who does the passionate song and dance about Coley's Point Primary and the courthouse, yet voted for the budget that's closing down the courthouse. She voted for the budget that removed Coley's Point Primary from government's infrastructure plan. So that's the kind of theatrics that I suspect we will see more of as the evening goes on.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MS. P. PARSONS: (Inaudible).

MR. KENT: And now she's shouting at me, Mr. Chair, which is probably audible for those who are listening to the webcast, and it's certainly audible to those who are gathered here in the gallery.

I would encourage the public to take part in this debate. You can't speak in this House unless you're an elected Member, but you can come to the public gallery and watch first hand and see some of the antics live, because some of what's going on here isn't obvious from the webcast or from the television broadcast.

Just because you don't have an opportunity to participate in the debate, you can still have your say.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. KENT: Members now are heckling about Twitter. Well, you know what, people can have a say through Twitter. People can use social media to express their views about what's going on here and to get the word out. We've seen in recent weeks how effective that is, actually, Mr. Chair.

So I encourage people to tweet. I encourage people to post on Facebook. I encourage people to send us emails. We will read them into the record in the House of Assembly during this debate. If you're really highly motivated and you'd like to get a first-hand view of what's going on in the House of Assembly, then the doors are open. As long as the debate continues

the public gallery will be open. Provided people are respectful and provided there are no disruptions in the gallery, people are welcome to come in and watch what's going on here, and I hope they will.

Mr. Chair, even in the first few hours of the debate here this evening, I'm getting lots of tweets and lots of Facebook posts and lots of emails from people who do have concerns and do have questions they want raised. I'm also hearing some really passionate positions from people in the Province. I'm going to just share with you one example, if you can bear with me for just one second.

Tonight, there were a group of young people that through Twitter said, hey, would you like a coffee, it's going to be a long night. I'm not a big coffee drinker but I said, sure, I'm sure some of my colleagues would like a coffee.

MS. ROGERS: Steve, I'd like a decaf.

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. KENT: That kind of defeats the purpose. The Member for St. John's Centre would like decaf coffee. I'm sure that's been noted by the bringers of coffee. Maybe they'll grant your request depending on how you contribute to the debate tonight, and I'm sure you'll do fine.

These young people are so concerned, they're so passionate, they're so upset by what's going on in our province right now on the watch of the Premier and this Liberal government that they decided to bring their concerns to the House of Assembly. The comment they made, which I made note of that I wanted to look up was, one of them is a young medical student. She is so upset about what's happening through this budget and the impact it will have on her and her colleagues and her family and her friends. She used the words that she's going to jump ship as soon as she's finishing her residency.

Prior to the last six months, that wasn't her plan. That wasn't her intention, because she believed there was a bright future for her in this province. I still believe there's a bright future for her here in this province. I haven't lost hope. I believe we can turn this around.

People are so upset by the decisions of this government and the impact that the budget will have on them that there are young people who are now choosing to make plans to leave the province. Those aren't my words. I'm getting those kinds of sentiments expressed to me on a daily basis.

There was another person, as part of the group we met tonight, who is a young teacher just starting her career in this province. Because of the devastating cuts that are being made to the education system through this budget, because of all of the other financial impacts that this budget will have on her, she's planning to look outside the province for work at this point as well. That's what we're dealing with, Mr. Chair. So it isn't a laughing matter and there are thousands of young people who are expressing those kinds of sentiments.

This is not a budget that just impacted young people. It impacted young and old alike and everybody in between. There's not an individual, there's not a citizen, there's not a family in this province that isn't hit hard by this budget.

We recognize that hard decisions have to be made, difficult decisions have to be made. There aren't any easy choices when it comes to dealing with the fiscal challenges that this province is facing. What I can tell you, Mr. Chair, and I know I'll have multiple opportunities to speak to this as the night goes on, we had a plan. We did have a plan.

Contrary to what Members opposite would have you believe, we had a plan that was measured. We had a plan that was balanced. We had a plan that over the next number of years would get the province back on the right fiscal track, but the choices the Liberal government have made will actually move us backwards. In fact, they'll move us right back to the '90s; the last time the Liberals did so much damage to our economy and to our society.

This budget will smother our economy. It will make it more difficult for families, more difficult for seniors, more difficult for businesses, more difficult for communities, more difficult for young people, like the ones I just mentioned.

What would we have done? Well, there's a lot we would have done. First of all, we had an attrition plan. It was a big part of our sustainability plan. What we were talking about, to put it in very simple terms, was as people retire from the public sector, recognizing how much the public sector has grown, and there were lots of legitimate reasons why that occurred, but the reality is we have to look at the size of our population, the size of our province and be realistic about what we can afford.

Well, we had a plan that said for every 10 people who retire from the public service, we're only going to replace eight of them. Then oil prices continued to plummet. Based on that impact, as the fiscal year continued, we would have had to make adjustments to that attrition plan. So perhaps we would have said okay, we'll replace six out of 10, just for argument sake, maybe five out of 10, but attrition was a key component of our plan. That's not something you heard any talk about in this budget.

Maybe, much like giving notice to the Nurses' Union, maybe the Finance Minister forgot. Maybe they had intended to make attrition part of their plan and maybe that was forgotten as well. That was a key part of our plan, because we recognize that government spending is at a rate that is not sustainable. There were steps we took in 2013 in the budget and in 2014 in the budget and in 2015 in the budget to address that. We will acknowledge there would be more to do at this point. Accelerating that attrition plan and making it even more aggressive would have absolutely been required.

Many of us have said multiple times, increases to certain taxes would absolutely be necessary. For instance, we would have had to raise income tax for people in certain tax brackets. We wouldn't have hit everybody the way the levy originally had and the way many of the other increases in this budget have. That's another area where, particularly for high-income earners who already pay a significant portion of the total tax revenue that's collected in this province, we would have had to make increases, particularly for those in higher income tax brackets.

We've made it very clear that unfortunately we would have had to postpone full-day kindergarten. Instead of doing so – which would

save money and which would also avoid a whole bunch of other cuts that are now happening in the K to 12 system – we're going to see more teachers taken out of our school system; we're going to see less resources for special services; we're seeing an attack on French immersion programs and on Intensive Core French programs; we're seeing multigrade classrooms at an unprecedented level. Some of those things could have been avoided if government was prepared to put the brakes on full-day kindergarten for a while.

Mr. Chair, I see my time is up. I'm going to have many opportunities to participate in this debate. I intend to raise many concerns that people have expressed to me in recent weeks, and I look forward to having the opportunity to do so.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's a pleasure to rise on behalf of the district I represent, Torngat Mountains, which is the most northerly district in the province, and by far the largest geographical district in the province. As a matter of fact, you could take the Island of Newfoundland and fit it in the district that I represent.

I'd just like to go back to November and work my way forward. I promise the Member for Mount Pearl North that I'm not a very theatrical person but I like to get my points across, and I will endeavour to do that.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to go back to just before the election. We were going into the election with the understanding from the previous administration that the deficit was \$1.1 billion. That's what we were told going into the election. When we got in there, we found out it was closer to \$3 billion. Actually, I think it was \$2.2 billion, and left unchecked it would have been

\$2.7 billion. Over twice what the previous administration said the deficit was.

Now, Mr. Chair, this is what we are left to deal with. This is what the former premier and his government has left us with. To come forward with a deficit that is \$1.1 billion more than they said it was, it does force us to make drastic changes. We have to take care of a deficit that is two times what the previous administration said it was.

Mr. Chair, this \$2.2 billion deficit was well known in the Finance department before the election. We know this because when the current Finance Minister did get a chance to sit down with the officials in the Finance department, I can only imagine the job she saw in getting our province's finances in order and to get back to a point where we're on an even keel.

I can now understand, Mr. Chair, why the previous administration went through a period of a premier a week, because they were sinking the province and they didn't want to tackle the financial issues at hand. This government is now left with the aftermath of the last government's spending party. We have the unfortunate task of trying to save our province from bankruptcy. We have the task of doing this without \$29 billion of royalty revenue that the previous administration had. Mr. Chair, they still left us with a \$2.2 billion bill that has to be paid. If left unchecked, it would have been a \$2.7 billion deficit which we'd still have to pay.

Mr. Chair, with our economy at a low in resources, at minimal, the task at hand is not an easy one and it's not a popular one. No doubt, this is a tough budget and the job at hand is a tough one. The question is, what would happen if we let this go unchecked? What would be the debt in one year? What would be the debt in two years, in 10 years? More importantly, Mr. Chair, what would we leave our future generations with? What would we leave for our children?

Given the \$2.7 billion deficit, it's regardless of what government was elected last fall, the task at hand would be the same. The formula might be a little different, maybe a little different, but whichever government was forced to do things the way they are, whether it's PC or Liberal, the impact would be the same. The NDP, in all

likelihood, would have to cut an extra billion or borrow an extra billion dollars to what they've already been forced to do.

Going back to the difference between this government and the previous administration is that it's their mismanagement of the province's finances that got us here. It's what they did, Mr. Chair, that got us here.

We've all heard from our constituents. Contrary to what the Official Opposition or the NDP are saying, not everyone is in opposition to this budget. We've also heard from people across this province. They're telling us they know what the problem is. They realize the mess we've inherited. They support a government that is stepping up. As hard as the former administration has made it for us with a ballooned deficit, they realize that much of this is temporary and by having a reduced deficit from \$2.2 billion to \$1.83 billion, we're on the right track. As hard as it is, we are on the right track.

When we get to a point where we actually want to be, through careful management and with an upturn in the economy, then many of these temporary measures can be removed. Then, Mr. Chair, we can go forward as a province that is stable. We can go forward as a province that has avoided bankruptcy.

Mr. Chair, one only has to use their imagination to think what would happen to this province of ours if it went into receivership, if it went into bankruptcy. We've staved that off, and we will continue to do it because no one else has stepped up to the plate. As a matter of fact, like I said, it's the previous administration that got us here in the first place.

Mr. Chair, we also want to be a province that goes forward that's poised to be financially sound. We have a monumental task of bringing our province back from the brink of bankruptcy. We have a monumental task of bringing our province back on an even keel. We will do this.

Mr. Chair, as much as the Opposition and NDP want to do nothing, which is what I'm hearing here tonight, we don't have a choice. We don't have any options. We don't have the resources that the previous administration had.

Mr. Chair, we've been in this position before, I think 2006. We've been here before. We came through it, although we didn't have a deficit that we have now.

I'd just like to take some quotes from the Member for St. John's Centre: This budget will kill the economy. This budget will cause mass exodus in numbers of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians leaving the province. Mr. Chair, the NDP has absolutely no idea of what to do in these financially challenging times. The best they can do is to magnify the impacts, and they're doing that. They are doing very well.

I could quote the Member for St. John's Centre from earlier this evening. I quote: If we cannot weather this storm, what then? Mr. Chair, that's all I heard.

The PC government is the reason, like I said earlier, why we are here. They're the reason we're here in this financial mess in the first place. I have to emphasize, they did this with \$29 billion-plus in royalty revenue and they still managed to give us a \$2.2 billion deficit.

Mr. Chair, my time is up. In conclusion, I'd just like to say that as tough as this budget is we've been through this before and we came through it, and we will do it again.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm certainly delighted to be doing my part to join this debate on Bill 14. I can tell you unequivocally, I will absolutely not be supporting Bill 14.

To be honest, Mr. Chair, I'm still in shock really from April 14 at the measures in this budget. I have to be honest, going into the budget I was thinking to myself it can't possibly be as bad as some of the rumblings we're hearing. When I actually got into the lock down and saw the

budget documents, then proceeded here into the House of Assembly, sat down and listened to the Budget Speech, I was shocked. I was appalled. I was dismayed. I was depressed. I'm still feeling a lot of these emotions because this Budget is anything but helpful for Newfoundland and Labrador, anything but stimulating in a time of economic challenges.

Mr. Chair, I've heard many speakers get up tonight and talk about they're trying to use the blame game again. Not one person I would think, other than Members opposite, in this entire Province of Newfoundland and Labrador was unaware of the dropping prices in oil. I wonder why they ran for the job if they really didn't realize that at the end of the day these oil prices and the unprecedented drop in oil prices was something that would have to be dealt with by whoever the government of the day was.

I would like to think they felt they had the abilities to overcome the challenges, as opposed to just sit back and play a game and tax the backs of the hardworking Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. The solution they have brought forward in this tax, tax, tax budget is one that I firmly believe is going to set our province back decades.

All the progress we have made in the last 10 years – and the last 10 years were probably the best this province has ever enjoyed – has been unravelled. It will be a long time before this province can recover from the severe job losses, the loss of confidence, not just by those people who are living in Newfoundland and Labrador, but by the global investment community that is now looking at Newfoundland and Labrador and saying what in the heck is going on in that province.

We talk about growth and diversification, we're only 500,000 strong, really a relatively small population base. So if we want to grow our economy we have to be attractive to these international companies. We want the mining companies to come and develop our vast natural resources. In order to do that, Mr. Chair, we have to have affordable access and reliable access to energy.

Let's look at the energy grid we have in Newfoundland and Labrador now – #darknl,

everyone remembers #darknl. Well, if we don't have something in place in the very near future to address just the residential needs of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador we're in big trouble, let alone being able to attract the big type of industry that are going to create the high-paying jobs that are going to attract people to live and work in Newfoundland and Labrador. I fear this government is doing anything but making the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador attractive to investors.

Now, one of the Members opposite – I do believe it was, and I stand to be corrected, it was probably the Member for Labrador West who got up and talked about, what type of solutions would you have done? Well, I want to talk, Mr. Chair – time goes way too fast in these 10 minutes but that's okay. We have a long time to debate Bill 14, and hopefully before the conclusion of Bill 14 we will see some changes, Mr. Chair. That's the ultimate goal we'd all really very much love to see, for the Liberal government to actually listen to what people are saying. People are saying we really can't withstand so much so fast, the measures in this budget are truly draconian.

Let's talk about, in terms of solutions. Well, right off the bat they lost \$100 million because they cancelled HST. That's one \$100 million, Mr. Chair, they could have easily not had showing up on the books. They also continued and proceeded to add new expenditures to the bottom line. So they get up, and in their key messaging strategy they're trying to do the blame game, oh, you spent all this money and when you had the money you spent it. Yes.

Well, who's complaining about the new schools? Nobody. Absolutely nobody got up and said, no, don't build that school. Absolutely nobody got up and said, don't pave that road. The Outer Ring Road; that is an investment that came to us as a people as a result of our prosperity that we enjoyed from the days of high oil prices, Mr. Chair. A crucial piece of infrastructure. In fact, I dread to think what it would be like trying to drive around in this city today if we didn't have these types of investments.

I'm digressing a bit again. In terms of solutions – I want to get back and stay talking on solutions

a little while longer. They said you're spending too much. Yet, what are they doing? They have increased bottom-line expenditures. In a time when they're trying to say we have to tax you because we have no money, they increased annual operating expenses by \$400 million.

Mr. Chair, \$30 million for full-day kindergarten. Really? Yes, that was something our government was looking at, but we certainly would have had the prudence and the responsibility to have delayed that decision until such a point in time that it was affordable, given the unprecedented drop in oil prices that the province has incurred.

Another \$30 million they're spending in their additional \$400 million of expenditures; they have a \$30 million slush fund there, a contingency set aside for emergencies. That contingency could keep a lot of libraries open. That contingency could pay for a lot of medications for our seniors. It could pay for a lot of prescription drugs that are now being removed from the Newfoundland and Labrador Drug Program, Mr. Chair. A lot of very, very – I think decisions were made that were wrong and are certainly not in the best interests of the people of the province.

Another thing, Mr. Chair, they talked about; well, the deficit would have been \$2.8 billion. I don't have the exact figures. I'm sure they can be provided for me. We, as a province in 2016, are paying extra in interest payments because our credit rating was downgraded in December. As a result of that downgrade in the credit rating, we are paying more in interest payments to the banks. Why is that happening? Because they didn't have a plan.

When they rolled out their budget in March, they didn't take a second hit to the downgrade, but we have definitely been downgraded in our credit rating post-election, Mr. Chair. Prior to that, the markets certainly did have confidence in the plan that our government had put forward.

What else were they doing in terms of adding to the bottom line? Well, they talked about you hired too many people. Yet, here they are adding to the bureaucracy, creating another layer. They're establishing a seniors' advocate office for \$500,000.

I, myself, am very supportive of a seniors' advocate. Very doubtful that the Liberal government will actually listen to a seniors' advocate and scratching my head as to why you're increasing the bureaucracy yet again. On the other hand, you condemn us for doing the very same thing.

MR. K. PARSONS: There's a seniors' advocate over here – a seniors' advocate.

MS. PERRY: Yes, every single one of us here in this House should be a seniors' advocate; I certainly agree.

Mr. Chair, they talk about another thing they listed as wastage: consulting fees. Yet, here they are, they've hired lawyers and they've hired a communication's specialist to help them with their union negotiations – two of which they forgot to notify. So are we going to be paying these people \$600 or \$700 an hour for a year and two unions are not even going to be negotiating now?

It's absolutely incredulous when you get up and hear the banter back and forth because there are solutions. In reasonable debate here on both sides of the House, I really do believe ideas can be put forward. Just because it comes from this side of the House, it gets squashed down, Mr. Chair, by the other side. Well, maybe we need to really show a difference that we are going to be different politicians. If you hear a good idea come across from this side – and I hear many all the time – why not consider that idea and implement it?

In terms of cost cutting, why in heaven's name are we trying to fix the budget by tax, tax, tax, tax on the backs of the hard-working person who now is going to have to live without a month or two of a pay cheque – total income will be gone to the tax man. Why aren't we looking at innovative solutions? Why are we taking away front-line services such as health care and libraries instead of looking at innovative solutions as to how we can deliver those front-line services better and at less cost?

Mr. Chair, I'm quickly out of time, but my next speech I want to talk about a vision for the province. I want to talk about what we can do to make this province more attractive to people.

The Liberal government's strategy is absolutely not the answer.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

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

For the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune, she wanted to update the House on her version of the ratings and the results of the rating changes that have been happening in this province. I remind the Member opposite that post-budget when the rating agencies looked at our budget – and I would add to the Member for St. John's Centre as well who likes to refer to the Alberta budget versus the Newfoundland budget, I remind the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune that what we saw was Standard & Poor's and the Dominion Bond Rating agency and Moody's, all responded to the strength of the government's long-term plan, and the plan that we articulated in the budget which would to bring the province back to surplus in seven years.

I go on, Mr. Chair, to say that DBRS also said that although the province is facing challenging times with the economy they recognize that – I quote – “government is committed to taking credible action as reflected by the substantive and difficult decisions announced in the current budget”

I'll go on, Mr. Chair, to remind the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune that Moody's stated in their response that – I quote – “The challenge facing the province is substantial, although we note that the government is exercising the full extent of fiscal flexibility Canadian provinces possess”

Mr. Chair, the conversation in this House over the last number of hours as we've debated what is Bill 14, the temporary deficit levy, and as members in the gallery and the people in the province listening at home would know this is a money bill and it allows the Members of the Opposition and the Members on the government

side to speak about anything related to the spending of the province.

Mr. Chair, what I'd like to do now is just to remind the Members of this hon. House of some facts. In 2011 and 2012 revenue from oil royalties for that year was \$2.795 billion. In this fiscal year, we have revenues from oil royalties budgeted at about \$500 million. That is a substantial difference.

I also would remind the Members of this House that in 2007-08 and 2009-10 gross expenses for this province increased by 37 per cent. Mr. Chair, I know there are many people in this gallery tonight and there are many people listening at home who clearly understand that if you spend more than you're bringing in, you have a problem.

Earlier tonight I had the opportunity to hear the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island. He made the comment that this budget is addressing the financial realities of the province on the backs of the people. I would ask the Member opposite, who enjoyed his term in government, relying on oil royalties to pay for the things they wanted to do and not recognizing the risk they were putting this province in – by not acknowledging the fact that the highest oil prices, the highest oil production happened in 2007 and 2008, yet they continued to spend at a rate that this province, Mr. Chair, I would suggest, couldn't afford.

The Member for St. John's Centre is very passionate about comparing the Alberta NDP budget to this government's budget. As I have said in this House before, the government in Alberta had a significant different reality than we have in our province, Mr. Chair. The reality is that they had limited debt. They also had much higher ratings, so the cost of borrowing to the people of the province who pay for this was substantially lower.

I would ask the Member for St. John's Centre is she suggesting – because I don't believe this is the case. I don't believe she's suggesting that we should borrow infinite amounts of money so that the people of the province are – actually, it won't be the people of the province; I'll take that back, Mr. Chair – that the children of the province today should be expected to pay for the

services that our generation uses today. I would suggest that is not what many parents, many grandparents and many people in this province want for our future.

Mr. Chair, I recognize that there is a tremendous amount of emotion, as I said earlier, around the temporary deficit levy, which is the bill we are discussing tonight. That is why we have committed to making changes as fast as we can with that deficit levy.

I would ask the Members opposite who have said, as the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island said, that this budget is layering on all the people – I would ask them: Which services would they cut to the tune of \$74 million? What exactly is it that they would take out that would allow the budget to remain in whole so that we could, in fact, make sure that we maintain the ratings?

The Members opposite will continue to debate tonight, and I'm sure they're going to continue to present their arguments on behalf of their constituents, just like the Members on this side of the House will continue to present arguments on behalf of our constituents – many of which understand that when you run six years of deficits out of 12 years, when you increase spending by 37 per cent and you don't recognize that \$2.7 billion worth of oil royalties, from the highest oil prices ever and the highest production ever, could be at risk and now we're left with half a billion dollars' worth of oil royalties, and they want to spend more.

Mr. Chair, I would suggest the Members of the Official Opposition have been believing their own press releases for too long and not acknowledging the facts. Mr. Chair, we have the highest debt per capita of any province in Canada. And for the Members opposite not to accept accountability for the reality that the people of this province are facing and the reality that we have the highest debt per capita of any province, I think is disingenuous and I believe the people of the province see the difference.

There's no doubt that this budget has been very difficult, and we understand that people do not like the temporary deficit levy. I can assure the people of this province that our government will work as hard as we can to make sure that deficit

levy is removed. And the legislation that we're presenting to be approved in this House actually commits to a date of when that deficit levy will be eliminated, and we hope to do it sooner, Mr. Chair.

I can tell you that from my perspective as the Member for Windsor Lake, I am not prepared to work with a government of inaction, to work with a government that doesn't recognize the fiscal challenges, and quite frankly, I believe our government is recognizing the facts and the reality of the situation that we are faced with. We will not leave our children with a type of debt that the plan that the former administration put in place last year would have resulted in. We will not. We will change the fiscal direction of our province because we must do that to ensure that we have the capacity to support and grow our economy, Mr. Chair.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

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

I am very happy to get up and to speak once again to the levy legislation, the Liberal levy, and it was very interesting to hear the Minister of Finance speak. And yes, this is a very difficult budget, and yes, the province is in a very, very difficult situation. I cannot stress again and again and again, as I have innumerable times, that when talking about what is happening in Alberta, I know we are not comparing apples to apples. What we're talking about is how we, as a province, how this government, as a province, respond to the very difficult financial situation we have in the province.

Nobody is denying that. Nobody denies that the budget, that the deficit, that the debt is extraordinary. Nobody, nobody, nobody is denying that. Nobody is denying that the fiscal reality in Alberta is very much different than the fiscal reality in Newfoundland and Labrador. There are some similarities, but we have to look at what the approach is.

When the Minister of Finance talks about their goal, their goal is to return to surplus in seven years. That's an interesting goal, but how do we get there and what is the effect on the people? That is the situation. Because just to cut and cut and cut so we can meet that goal, what happens to the people?

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, we have faced years and years of adversity, absolute years of adversity. We know about tightening our belts. We know about making due with. We know what happened to our province during the decline in the fishery. So people know about that, and people in the province are willing to swallow the bitter medicine if it brings us forward. If in the end, aside from coming to a fiscal surplus, that the people are better off, that our communities are better off, that our province is better off, that our communities are strengthened, that our people are strengthened, that our province is strengthened.

There is nothing – nothing – in this budget that points to that. All that the Minister of Finance can say is that in seven years, we will return to surplus. What will happen to our people during those seven years? Again, people who are used to adversity, who are used to tightening our belts, people who are resilient, people who are creative, who are willing to work hard, because that's what we have in this province.

So how will people cope? Will people be better off? Maybe the books will look like they are better off, but what it does mean, what is the vision, what does the Minister of Finance, what does the Premier – what is their vision for the province? What will this province look like in seven years? Will our people be better educated? Probably not because they're cutting back on education, and not cutbacks that make any sense; for instance, when I look at the closure of a junior high school in my district – which will negatively impact the children in my district; we all know that. So what will happen to our people? Who will be strengthened by this?

We're seeing cutbacks in our health care system and we're seeing cutbacks to seniors. Is that going to make things better? Again, people are willing to swallow the bitter medicine if, in fact, it provides a cure, if, in fact, our people are better off. That's not what we're seeing.

I would love if the Minister of Finance or if the Premier would stand up in this House and say in seven years not only might we have surplus – but I'm kind of doubting it, Mr. Chair, because we know, they've said themselves, that their measures, their grim measures, will increase unemployment and decrease earning income for the people of the province.

So I would love if they could stand up in this House and say in seven years, maybe we will return to surplus but this is what our province is going to look like. This is how our people are going to be better off. This is the better education system that we're going to have. This is the better health care system that we're going to have. This is the diversified economy that we are going to have. We are never going to rely solely on oil again, but they haven't said that. It's not in their budget. It's not in anything that anybody on the other side of this House has stood up and talked about, and that's what we need.

We need a government who is willing to lead us, to strengthen us as we go through this storm and we haven't heard a word about this, and that is what is devastating. Yes, the economy is devastating, but also what's devastating is the lack of leadership, the lack of vision and the lack of hope. That's what people are feeling. We're getting it from people all over the province.

So how much we, as a people of Newfoundland and Labrador, need to hear a visionary statement. We need to hear a guarantee that the Minister of Finance and the Premier's gaze is not just on an economic line. And no, no one here is saying that you should borrow and borrow and borrow and kick the can on down to the lives of our children. What we're saying is where are you taking us? Where is this budget taking us? All we can see is further impoverishment. There's no indication of any new money. The revenue they're talking about is picking people's pockets, taking more and more and more money from the people of the province.

There is nothing for diversification. There's nothing that indicates that this government has a creative approach to using the energy of the people, to using the skills and the expertise of the people to make things better. That's what

budgets should be about, they should be about progress. They should be about making things better, making people stronger, making our public services stronger and making sure that people can get to work.

That's new revenue. Not picking people's pockets, but making sure there are more people working and that more people are paying taxes. People are willing to pay taxes when they see they are fair. We know that. People are willing to pay to make sure we have a good education system, good health care, good roads and that our roads are maintained and cleared in the winter. There's no indication in this budget, and I've read the budget again and again and again, looking for that.

We listened. We've been listening for weeks in this House, listening for some kind of plan that shows that this government is propelling us forward. It's not there. It's like they've abandoned the people. Like they're saying, you know folks, all we can do is – we have to raise our fees and we have to raise our taxes in some ways, and we're going to cut this and cut that, but that's all we can do. They applied for this job and the people of the province gave them this job.

They brought it. They wanted it. They worked hard to get it. They went out and made all kinds of promises and said this is what we're going to do. We're not going to cut jobs; we're going to make sure everybody is working. We're not going to close schools. We're not going to raise the HST. That's what they said in their job interview before the people of the province. Mr. Chair, 520,000 people across the province were part of that job interview. That's what they said in their job interview.

That's not what we got. They got the job, but they certainly haven't held on to those promises. They can squeeze every penny out of every senior, they can squeeze every penny out of every working person here in the province, they can squeeze every penny out of increasing fees or starting new fees, but it's not bringing us forward. It's not making us stronger as a province. It's maybe reducing the deficits, it's maybe reducing the debt, but to what end?

At the end of the seven years – even though I do not believe for a minute they will bring us to surplus because they don't have any new money coming in. You know they're going to keep on picking the pockets. The only way they can reach that moment of surplus is if, in fact, they have new money coming in. Maybe all they are doing is relying on the price of oil going up or the price of minerals going up. I don't know. Is that what they're relying on? It's a job to say, Mr. Chair, because do you know what? They haven't told us.

What they have told us on page 5 of their budget is that there's going to be greater unemployment by the end of seven years and that it's going to be as a result of some of the measures they have taken. I don't think that's anything to be hopeful about. I tell you, I'm grasping for hope here, and the people of the province are grasping for hope here.

I'm hoping the people of the province will stay.

CHAIR: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member her speaking time has expired.

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

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair.

MS. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's always a pleasure to stand on my feet and be a voice and represent the beautiful district in Southern Labrador of Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. DEMPSTER: I'm honoured to be a voice and to represent them.

Mr. Chair, for the benefit of the people who might be viewing from home, we are in the middle of debate tonight in the late hours. It's 11:15 p.m. Most of us, our day started about 16 hours ago. I think it's going to go for another eight or 10, but it is the business we signed up for. We are considering a resolution respecting

the imposition of a deficit levy on taxable income, Bill 14.

Mr. Chair, just since the budget came down, there's been very, very positive progress on this temporary reduction levy. I think that's a good place for me to start.

The Member for St. John's Centre just talked about: We signed up for this job. We went out and we did an interview and we wanted the job. She's absolutely right. Every one of us who stand on our feet in this House, 40 of us representing 40 districts, we go out and we knock on doors. In my case, I have smaller numbers so I was able to knock on every door, I believe, in my district. I've done it twice, or three times in the last three years.

You have interesting conversations at the doors. You get to know people. You get to know their issues. You get to know the demographics. You know how many people are older and what their issues are. That's very important, Mr. Chair. If you are going to represent a group you need to know what the issues are, you need to meet with municipalities in your area, you need to know what the community projects are and on and on it goes.

So we did sign up, but, Mr. Chair, it is a sad state of affairs when after an election you wake up and you find out the condition we are in, in this little tiny province of 527,000 people. We're paying \$20 million in interest, \$80 million a month, \$900 million a year.

I have a daughter too. Many people here tonight have referred to their children and their grandchildren. I have a daughter in the city training to be a nurse. She's going to make a fantastic nurse, I do believe. I might be slightly biased.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MS. DEMPSTER: I want a future for her, Mr. Chair. What happens if we had done nothing and this staggering, daunting \$2.7 billion deficit went unchecked? We become bankrupt as a province?

The Member for St. John's Centre talks about us abandoning people. I beg to differ, Mr. Chair. I believe the measures we have taken are because we care about the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and because we want a future and we want to ensure a secure future for the people we represent.

Mr. Chair, I was thinking about it earlier tonight as I sat here. Many of us left good jobs. We left good jobs and we came in and we ran to represent a district. We didn't do that to go out now and cut everything to the bare bone. We didn't do that because we left good jobs, nine-to-five jobs. We are here at 11 o'clock at night and we are debating a levy.

It doesn't give us joy or pleasure to inflict, what Members opposite would call, misery on the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We didn't cause the problem, but there's one thing for sure, we inherited it. We did inherit it. So it's been a tough spring. We've all admitted that it's been a terrible budget and it's been a lot of tough choices.

The Member for Mount Pearl North stood and said, there's no easy choice, there's no doubt about that. Then the Member for Mount Pearl North went on to say, we had a plan. Well, Mr. Chair, I would say to the Member for Mount Pearl North, you had 12 years to implement your plan. When were you going to implement it, after this election? He said we had a plan. Where's your plan? I know what we walked into, \$2.7 billion in deficit. That's after \$25 billion in oil royalty.

I haven't been here too long. I've been here – it'll be about 2½ years in the House. I wouldn't consider myself a senior MHA, but when I look around I do see that I am more senior than many that's in the House. In my little short span of 2½ years, Mr. Chair, it's staggering how much I can look back over and see wastage and see mismanagement and see bad choices.

I live in a part of this province where I am a stone's throw from, I think it's the fifth largest megaproject in this world, a multi-billion dollar project that right now, I might add, is significantly behind schedule, is significantly over cost. Land in my area has been ripped to

shreds. Major towers are going down over the land.

Guess what we're getting out of that, Mr. Chair? Guess what our people are getting from that project? Nothing. I live in an area where our communities are run on dirty diesel generators. They said we're going down through with DC power. That is the most reliable form of power. The only way we could splice your communities in Southern Labrador is we would have to put in a converter. We could not consider a converter because that's a \$300 million bill. Here we are, Mr. Chair, billions overdue.

When I first came to the House time and time and time again our now Premier, leader of the Opposition at that time, we called for independent oversight. We knew that contractors were coming and going. We knew that money was coming and going, taxpayers' dollars. They didn't listen, Mr. Chair.

What did they do? The Joint Review Panel, the PUB, the only two groups that were going to do an independent oversight to see if this project was the most cost effective way to go, they shut it all out, Mr. Chair. They brought in Bill 29, covered everything up and they sanctioned the project. Where are we today? What I'm telling is the truth.

The Member for Cape St. Francis was up earlier tonight and he referenced my district. He said, you were up in Cartwright on the weekend. I was up in Cartwright on the weekend. I had a lovely time in Cartwright. I represent a rural district. I have a lot of travel, Mr. Chair.

Talk about being scared to go home. I'll tell you what I go through to go home, Mr. Chair. I get on a plane every Friday for three hours and I get in Goose Bay. Then I drive a gravel road for 420 kilometres just to get to see my people, to get to the events, to represent them, to hear from them.

Am I scared to go home, Mr. Chair? I don't think I've missed a weekend since the budget came down to walk into big forums where the fisher people are, to walk into graduations, to go to retirement dinners so that the people can see me, they can approach me and they can talk to me.

Yes, I spent two days in Cartwright, a beautiful community, wonderful people. I told them there the other night they'd give the shirt off their back and the last piece of smoked salmon from their pantry. Those are the people that I'm proud to represent.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. DEMPSTER: What did I hear when I was in Cartwright? They didn't give me a hard time about the budget. Do you know what they said? They said what a mess you walked into – what a mess. Our heart goes out to you. That's what I hear when I'm in my district – what a mess. Where would we have ended up if you never stepped in?

Mr. Chair, the truth is maybe we don't all agree on some of the choices that were made, but one thing we do agree on is that choices had to be made. Things will turn around. As I said many times, using the ship analogy, things will turn around and improve and get better. I believe that.

It's difficult to sit here and to hear the Opposition time and time again get up and talk about you raised taxes for this; you raised taxes for that – why did we do it? Why did we have to do all that, Mr. Chair?

I sat here over the last couple of years, I saw things where Bill 29, don't do it, it's wrong, it got national media attention for days, it's a draconian piece of legislation, it's not right, you're going down a wrong road; but like many things they stuck to their guns, they did it. Then they had to commission a report – it was Marshall at that time. Tom Marshall I have a lot respect for. I think he's a fantastic man; I knew in a personal life. He sanctioned, but it was again at a cost. Bill 1 came about as a review of Bill 29, and that was at a cost of over \$1 million to the taxpayers.

Humber Valley Paving, Mr. Chair, what a mess in my district – \$19 million. Mr. Chair, I got expelled from this House for that. I believe that as an elected official, I have to follow parliamentary rules and procedures, but I am only human too. When I got up and said a word that I wasn't supposed to say in this House, I found it hard to take that back when I had many

small businesses in my district back then and still today – I talked to someone last week – holding the bag because of Humber Valley Paving. They gave back the full bonds, \$19 million, and I have small businesses in my area still today owed \$30,000, owed \$11,000, owed \$6,000. Might not sound much to the government of the day at the time, but it's a lot to a small business in rural Labrador.

I want to go for a minute – my time is almost out. The Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune talked about us increasing our expenditures by \$400 million. Mr. Chair, I want to remind the public, \$222 million of that was to save and secure the teachers' pension. Some of that was the increased cost of borrowing. The rest of it was the continuing impacts of the job evaluation system. Hard costs that we had to put there to secure for the people –

CHAIR: Order, please!

MS. DEMPSTER: – and I look forward to getting on my feet again –

CHAIR: Order, please!

MS. DEMPSTER: – later tonight, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: I remind the hon. Member her speaking time is expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Glad to get a chance to get up again and speak in the Bill 14 debate. Because of the nature of this debate, we're talking about all things budget. We're talking about all the issues that matter to people in the province. Mr. Chair, for the next nine-and-a-half minutes or so I want to talk about an issue that we spent considerable time on in the House of Assembly today. That's Bill 35.

We debated a piece of legislation today that brought in amendments to the *Tobacco Control Act* and the *Smoke-Free Environment Act*. Probably 80 per cent – to use a round number,

about 80 per cent of the stuff that was in the bill was pretty good and I think most people in the House would agree with. However, there were some real problems in this legislation.

What we've been hearing throughout the discussion on the budget over the last month and a half is that government is not listening. Today, anybody who was following the debate would have seen that first-hand. We brought forward concerns today on behalf of the vaping community, on behalf of the vaping industry, on behalf of people that have used vaping as a form of harm reduction, as a way to stop smoking cigarettes and use vaping as a way to get off cigarettes and use it as an appropriate harm-reduction tool, which is the way it ought to be used.

We brought forward some suggestions that the vaping community seemed very supportive of. We've researched it. We found there was compelling evidence to support what they were asking for. We even looked to other jurisdictions and found that Manitoba, for instance, has legislation that is far more balanced and far more progressive than what's going to be brought in here as a result of the debate that happened here today.

I just want to recap that for you because there are people listening tonight who didn't have an opportunity yet to go back and watch the debate today. They can read it in Hansard tomorrow or they can watch online. We brought forward some concerns that were ignored by government today. For instance, we said it makes sense for customers to be able to sample products in a vapour shop with trained staff who can explain the products and make sure that there are no big safety concerns. People won't use the wrong products together; they'll know how to properly use the equipment. That was ignored by government.

Bill 35 makes it illegal to activate a vapour product in a vapour shop. That's a huge step backwards. The Province of Manitoba has figured it out, but here in Newfoundland and Labrador in Bill 35, it's now going to be illegal to activate a vapour product in a vapour shop.

Those that are working in the vaping industry here in our province, I haven't met them all, but

of the people that I do know and of the people that I know of who are running reputable legitimate businesses, they've taken such a strong stand on wanting to manage this industry properly that they've said we don't want minors in our stores. We want it to be illegal for underage people to enter a vapour shop, whether they're with an adult or not. This legislation actually makes it legal for underage children to enter a vapour shop with an adult.

Mr. Chair, during the debate today I had an opportunity to read messages, emails, letters from people that have expressed concern about Bill 35. The bill was only tabled in this House on Thursday. We had a chance to learn a bit about it on Friday and do some research over the weekend. Then we got through, not only second reading debate today, we introduced a hoist amendment to try and delay this legislation and allow for a period of time for the public to actually have some input because the public hasn't had any input so far.

It got rushed through Committee stage as well, not even really allowing time for amendments to be considered had we had time to research and prepare amendments that would have addressed some of these concerns. There was no willingness on the part of the Liberal government to listen.

So I had an opportunity during the debate today. I spoke for two 20-minute segments and I spoke in Committee as well to read some of the correspondence that I've received. Here's one I didn't get a chance to read. This is from a longer chain of comments to a post on Facebook today: Absolutely, it shouldn't be used in workplace or other public places, but should be allowed to be used in shops to test for consumers. People are not asking to be able to use it anywhere, they're asking to be able to continue to use flavoured e-liquid, be able to seek help with devices and flavours and ultimately be free from tobacco.

In the UK, there have been professional studies completed by government which proves it is 95 per cent safer than smoking cigarettes. Four hundred and seventy thousand Atlantic Canadians smoke, 37,000 Canadians die from smoking each year. Vaping actually saves people's lives. To classify it as tobacco is ludicrous. Ingredients are very simple: vegetable

glycerine, propylene glycol, nicotine and flavouring. Vegetable glycerine and propylene glycol – glycol?

AN HON. MEMBER: Glycol.

MR. KENT: Glycol, thank you very much – are found in common household goods you ingest every day. Research should be conducted by government before making judgment on possibly – which could save millions over time and health care costs and give people their lives back, a billion lives.

That's just one person's perspective, but I share it, Mr. Chair, because it was one of the ones I didn't get a chance to share today. It highlights that people who are passionate about these issues that we brought forward today are generally taking a very fair and reasonable approach.

The people involved in the industry that I'm talking to are not saying don't regulate. In fact, they're saying we applaud regulation. The industry should be regulated. That makes it safer for everybody. There are people who also reviewed Bill 35 over the weekend and said there are lots of good things in that bill that should be brought forward, absolutely.

When we're talking about vaping specifically, there's a clause in Bill 35 that makes it illegal for anybody, whether it's a business or not, to provide anything related to vaping to minors. So that's a common sense, smart move on the part of government, but these issues we're raising, that are legitimate issues on behalf of those who have benefited from vaping, are being ignored by this government. That's really unfortunate, Mr. Chair.

Consumers have a right to information about vapour products. This legislation that was rushed through the House today actually makes it near impossible for vaping businesses to share information with their customers. There's even a question about whether some of the social media support groups and advocacy groups that have been set up will be legal once Bill 35 becomes law within the next several weeks. There are some elements of the bill that will become law before June is over. There are some elements that will become law as of July 1, 2017.

Time and time again, when you listen to government Members speak to Bill 35, and even if you look at the language in the bill, it seems that people were unable to distinguish between vapour products and tobacco products. They're not tobacco products. There's no tobacco in vapour products. Even in terms of the definitions, there are suggestions that vaping is like smoking. Well, there's no smoke in vapour. There's no combustion; therefore there is no smoke.

These are arguments that needed to be brought forward. There were sensible changes that could have been made to Bill 35, but once again, just like we've seen throughout this entire budget debate, government is not listening. MHAs are not listening to their constituents. Government is not listening to the people of the province. Just simply regulating promotion of vaping as harshly as the tobacco industry is unfair and it's not sensible.

We need to really consider the whole debate about vaping in a really balanced way. We need to recognize that it has to be about harm reduction. I know there is compelling evidence and research on both sides of the argument, but there is no doubt in my mind after the work I've done over the last 72 hours or so, that vaping is safer than smoking tobacco, than smoking cigarettes. We know that much to be true. It can be an effective form of harm reduction. It should be regulated, but it should be regulated in a sensible way, in a balanced way, in a progressive way. We brought forward – I quoted the legislation for Manitoba today.

I urge government to make changes that would result in a more fair and balanced and sensible approach in Newfoundland and Labrador. Once again, this government would not listen to the people that it's been elected to serve. That's a shame, Mr. Chair. Those issues need to be brought to the House of Assembly. On this side of the House, we'll continue to make sure that those issues get raised.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

MR. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, it's a pleasure to stand here this evening and talk a little bit about *Budget 2016* and maybe some of the reasons of what brought us to *Budget 2016*. I listened attentively over the last few days to certain Members of the Opposition that took some time. On Thursday afternoon the Leader –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. CROCKER: Mr. Chair, I'd appreciate an opportunity –

CHAIR: I remind all hon. Members that the floor has been given to the hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture.

MR. CROCKER: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, I'm just going to speak for 10 minutes about *Budget 2016* and what led us to *Budget 2016*. On Thursday afternoon the Leader of the Official Opposition stood in the House and actually closed debate. He talked about the moves his administration and the administration before him – moves they made in the years leading up to 2015.

A couple of things the Leader of the Opposition pointed out was in *Budget 2015* they created two new tax brackets to help with the deficit issue that we were facing even back in 2015. They eliminated the Residential Energy Rebate and they increased corporate income taxes, all moves that were necessary in 2015. Where that left us – just remember, after these moves that the previous administration took in *Budget 2015* it left us, in 2016, with a deficit of \$2.8 billion.

The Member for Mount Pearl North said recently – actually, he heckled across the House – they made huge progress. I think when the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair was up, he said to someone we made huge progress. The huge progress that the previous administration made left us with a \$2.8 billion

deficit. That was the huge progress that the previous administration left us with.

Go no further than the *Highlights* document from *Budget 2015* where the then Finance minister says, this situation we find ourselves in is a temporary one. That was the mindset of the previous administration, temporary. They didn't plan for tomorrow. We had \$25 billion in revenue over a 10-year period.

At one point I remember in 2006 or 2007, we had a \$2.5 billion surplus in this province, a surplus that almost wipes out this year's deficit. Just imagine, if there would have been some planning with \$25 billion royalties over a 10-year period, simple planning could have alleviated some of the situations we find ourselves in here in 2016 as we debate this budget.

The previous administration gets up and talks about changing the equalization formula. In their administration, they had two opportunities to change the equalization formula – two opportunities. Mr. Chair, this is a very interesting document. If you even look at – they talk about their plan they had, the plan. Well, let's look at some of the assumptions in that plan. The assumptions on this plan are quite interesting.

AN HON. MEMBER: You're quoting from where?

MR. CROCKER: *Budget 2015*.

Key energy and economic assumptions – so this is what brought us to where we are today at a \$2.8 billion deficit. The assumption on Brent Crude for 2016-2017, this fiscal year, \$71; ladies and gentlemen, do the math: \$31 off the mark.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. CROCKER: \$31 off the mark.

The exchange rate, 82 cents; they planned of an exchange rate of 82 cents. So, Mr. Chair, you quickly see what led us to this situation. And no doubt, I believe the Official Opposition that they do truly understand, to an extent, where we are to. I haven't heard many solutions, but when you

look at the assumptions in this document – and nobody could predict the oil prices.

I heard the Leader of the Opposition say on Thursday afternoon that as he began to run in his leadership campaign that the price of oil dropped and dropped and dropped. It did and it got us where we're to today, and it got us in a situation where we've had to make some tough choices, some very tough choices as a government, not choices that any of us, I can assure you, would want to make. But I can assure you as a parent of two teenage children, I have to make the choices so that we have a future for our next generation, something left so that they have an opportunity here in this province.

I hear my colleagues talk about their grandchildren. I hope someday that my grandchildren can live in this province, that my children can live in this province, but what we need to do is set the economics of this province back to a stable foundation. A foundation that borrowing \$2.8 billion would never get us on. The number that troubles me, every time I hear a number of \$950 million this year – \$950 million – we're going to pay in interest on our debt –

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. CROCKER: \$950 million; \$850 million is what we have available for education. We look at it and we think about it. What we could do with education and choices we could make with \$950 million. The plan that this budget, *Budget 2015*, touts leaves us with a deficit of \$2.8 billion, a net debt in five years' time of \$25 billion.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. CROCKER: \$25 billion – this plan here. This plan leaves us with a \$25 billion dollar debt in five years. A \$25 billion debt would leave us with an interest payment of over \$2 billion – more than twice as much as what we invest in education. Just imagine. Health care, I believe, costs us \$3 billion a year – \$3 billion a year for health care. In five years' time, we would be \$1 billion off on interest of what we are for health care. Just imagine. Those are the choices we are faced with as a people. I believe most Members in this House understand that we could not go down the road of *Budget 2015*.

I respect the Leader of the Opposition when he talked about the steps his administration made last year. The thing we have to realize is the steps the previous administration made in 2015 led us to a deficit of \$2.8 billion. That's where we too. At the end of the day, we had a \$2.8 billion deficit to deal with. It doesn't matter who the administration was on December 1. It was irrelevant who the administration was on December 1. No matter what administration took this side of this House on December 1, they were going to have a \$2.8 billion deficit to deal with, and it has to be dealt with. We've taken the steps to start to deal with it.

Are the choices easy? No, they're not easy. They're not easy. I did not get in public life, like the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair said a few minutes ago, to do anything to a neighbour or to a friend that doesn't help them. That was never my purpose of getting into public life. But we do, as a government, have a responsibility to create fiscal stability so that my children, our children, our grandchildren, have a financial situation in this province where they have an opportunity. We have to give them an opportunity. There's no opportunity by spending \$950 million a year on interest payments. Imagine, \$950 million a year on interest alone.

Anyway, Mr. Chair, I'll take my place, but I'll probably get an opportunity again a little bit later to go into some more – sorry, Madam Chair. Before I do sit down – I'll do this every time I stand in the next few days – I want to just take an opportunity to point out two events in my district this summer. In Heart's Content, we have the 150th anniversary of the laying of the first transatlantic cable on July 27.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. CROCKER: Yes, Tolson did a lot of work for Heart's Content 150.

Also, the Carbonear Volunteer Fire Department, this July, will also celebrate their 175th anniversary. So that's two events in my district and I will point out some more.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR (Dempster): The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's a pleasure to stand once again and speak to Bill 14 – sorry, not Bill 14. I don't even know what the number is now. Anyway, it doesn't really matter what the number is.

AN HON. MEMBER: Bill 29

MR. LANE: Someone said Bill 29. That's a good bill. That's a good number. Regardless, it's the levy bill anyway. We all know what we're speaking to.

Madam Chair, it is great to have another opportunity. I look forward to having many more. I want to say to the Minister of Fisheries, I agree with what he said. Absolutely, I agree with what he said. We all know we're in a tough financial situation. We all know there was a lot of spending that was done over the years that could have been done differently. We know we lived beyond our means.

I don't think anyone is arguing that. I don't. I'm certainly not arguing it. The people I talk to are not arguing it. We all understand we're in that situation. We all understand that something has to be done to curtail spending and to raise revenue. Everybody gets that.

I just want to put it out there that, certainly from my perspective and I believe the public's perspective, this is not about blaming one side or the other for where we are or whatever. It's not really blaming the government in that they have to take action. I'm not. I agree action has to be taken, but I think it's just a matter of degrees. What we're talking about here is a matter of degrees. That's really it.

Some of the decisions – which we can all make decisions. We can all argue was this the best decision or was that the best decision. I think some of the decisions are necessary. I think everybody understands that. I think we all understand that we have to raise taxes in one form or another, but it's just too much too fast is what the people feel. It just went a little too far, that's all. That's really what it's all about.

There are things in the budget expenditures that perhaps maybe we shouldn't be putting in there, that we should be using to offset some of the taxation. We have that \$30 million has been referenced, the contingency fund. That's what I'm going to call it. I know there have been some colourful names put on it, but it's a contingency fund. I've said from day one that I believe the concept of a contingency fund is a good idea. I really do. I say to the Minister of Finance, it is a good idea to have a contingency fund. We probably should have always had a contingency fund, but we didn't.

The question is, though, given the circumstance we're in right now, given the level of taxation we're going to put on people right now, is this the right time to do it? That's the question. Is it the right time to do it? Not that it's a bad idea in concept, but if you've never done it before why would you do it now? Given the fact of where we are and given the fact we're going to have to impose all these taxes on people. That's a reasonable question. I think it's a reasonable question.

We look at the situation with the education system and the full-day kindergarten. Everybody agrees that full-day kindergarten is a good idea. The research is there to say it's a good thing. No one is arguing that; I'm not arguing it. I haven't heard anybody over here argue it, but given the fiscal situation we're in should we be expending that money on full-day kindergarten at this time?

At the same time that we're spending this money and investing – I'm going to call it investing because it's not a waste of money. Some people might want to portray it that way for political purposes or whatever, I'm not. It's not a waste of money. It's a good thing. Full-day kindergarten is a good thing. There is no doubt there will be people who will benefit from – the children certainly. Research is there to show they would benefit from full-day kindergarten.

I'm sure there are a lot of parents – I read an email, or I referenced an email I got from one of my constituents who said: Paul, I understand where you're coming from on the full-day kindergarten, but not all your constituents are against moving forward with full-day kindergarten. I'm not against it, but he did say: But just to let you know, I am kind of biased

because the implementation of full-day kindergarten is going to save me money in daycare. It's going to save me money. Now, that's not necessarily the right reason to do it, but at least he was upfront and honest in saying there was a financial benefit to full-day kindergarten in that particular case.

Nobody is arguing we shouldn't do it, but do we do it now at the same time that we're imposing all this taxation. Do we do it now at the same time that we're making cuts in other areas like to seniors for non-prescription medications and stuff like that. Do we do it at the expense of existing programs? That's a legitimate question. I'm not beating up on anybody here, I'm really not.

It's a decision that was made that I'm sure was a thoughtful decision. I'd say, I'd be surprised if it was 100 per cent unanimous even in the Cabinet when they came up with it. I'd say there was probably a lot of debate. Now, I don't know, I wasn't there, but my guess would be that resulted in a fair amount of debate even amongst Cabinet.

Should we do this at this time, given the fact that we're going to be making cuts to existing programs, given the fact that we have resource cuts or not enough resources for children with special needs, given the fact that we have issues around space in the classroom to safely put the children in, given the fact that we're going to have to look at multigrading in areas where we've never had multigrading and team teaching where we've never had team teaching, given the fact now that we're literally going to have to draw names out of a hat to see which child gets to do core French and which child doesn't get to do core French.

I understand. I totally understand that Members would stand up here – and rightfully so – and say my kids in my area don't have the option of core French. I understand that. There are Members who would stand up and say in my particular area I've got multigrading, had it for years and all that. I'm sure that's true. I'm not arguing that either. Just because that's the case doesn't mean we all have to go down to the lowest possible denominator. It's not a case of because we don't have it, nobody should have it. Maybe it should be everyone should have it as

opposed to the other way around. You don't have it, so we'll go down to this level.

These are just some of the decisions, and this is not a budgetary one. This whole issue around education is not a monetary thing. If anything, it's probably going to cost us more money to do what we're doing and we're going to have a negative impact in the meantime.

Then we're going to have an impact with the busing. I've heard Members talk about – I know the Member for Cape St. Francis talked about the busing, like a double run and stuff like that. That's going to cause chaos for some families in terms of making sure their child gets to school safely, the timing of that and having to get to work. One sibling on one run and one on another run, and all these types of issues. There are concerns around that, that we didn't have before.

So we're doing these things and they're going to have a negative impact. I don't know why we would do that. I know that's not the intent. I really believe in my heart that there is nobody on any side of this House who wants to do anything to hurt their constituents. I know that's the case. I don't want to, nobody here wants to, and no one else. I know nobody wants to do that, Madam Chair.

Everybody got elected and everyone wants to try to do the right thing. I believe some decisions that were made were based on the fact that the Cabinet felt it was doing the right thing. I'm not arguing that, and I'm not knocking them for it. They had to make decisions. They made decisions, I respect that but that doesn't mean people have to necessarily agree with all of the decisions.

That's what debate is all about. That's why we have democracy, because decisions can be made and decisions can be challenged. That's why we do it. Whether it's legislation or the budget or whatever it is, that's democracy. So there doesn't have to be any animosity, any us and them, it's just 40 people who are here, who are all elected and they're trying to do the best thing for their constituents. That's all it's about.

We have a number of concerns – I have, I know other Members have, that their constituents have brought forward and we're going to continue to

bring them forward. That's our job, and that's what we were elected to do.

When we look at *Budget 2016*, there's no doubt there are things that were done that we would all agree with, there are things there that we might not like but we understand are necessary, but that doesn't mean all the best decisions were made, and we'll continue to bring it up.

CHAIR: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member his time for speaking has expired.

MR. LANE: Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

MR. K. PARSONS: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

It's an honour to get up here again. What I always say, and I forgot to say it the last time I got up, I represent the beautiful district that I'm from and the beautiful people who are in my district, the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis. I have to say, there are wonderful people down there. I have a job to do to represent them. I'm their representative and I try to do my best in this House. I try to be as positive as I can in this House and I try to give credit where credit is due.

We are here tonight and basically we're doing Bill 14 which is the levy bill. I'm just going to talk a little bit about the levy first. The bill that we're debating here tonight – like I said, I give credit where credit is due – is 100 per cent better than what you brought in in the first place. I think the people across the way will have to agree with that. That the levy that was brought in first was probably not as well thought out as it should have been. I think you will agree to that because the outcry from the general public in the province really thought that the levy was unfair and it was an attack on low-income people.

If you looked at the first way it came in, a person making \$25,000 had to pay \$300 and then it went up as you were making – but it was unfair how disproportionate it was. People really did find it difficult and they called it as it was. It

was basically a cover charge to come to Newfoundland and Labrador to live here. I have to say this is a whole lot better than what it was. It is a whole lot better than what it was.

A lot of people in my district will benefit from the new levy because people do make less than \$50,000 a year. But there is a portion also in my district, a good portion, I'd say it's higher than the 25 per cent that the Minister of Finance states that it is – 26 per cent and she said 74 per cent. But in my district, I really believe it could be as high as a little over 50 per cent.

Still, I have 50 per cent of my constituents that will pay this levy. Now again, it's a lot better than what it was because people up to \$90,000 and less, pay a lot less than what they were going to pay before. It's done in a fairer way than what was done before because the last time they did it, they just never thought about what they were doing. I don't know where it came up from. Everyone that you speak to, the levy was the talk of everything because it was so unfair.

It was so unfair when you'd see somebody making \$25,000 having to pay \$300 and someone making \$250,000 having to pay \$900. If you did the math on that, just the proportion and the percentage that the person would have to pay was unfair. So you have it straightened up a bit, but still, 50 per cent in my district are going to pay a cover charge, I'll call it, a charge to live here in the province. I really believe that's unfair.

The Minister of Justice – it's a good district. There are a lot of good people and there are a lot of people making – we're fortunate. Listen, I am not saying in any slight way – I'm fortunate to live in a district that we do have a lot of people. I know there are some districts in different parts of Newfoundland that don't have what my district has when it comes to the income and their families. No matter where it is, any time that we take people that are making less than \$50,000 and they don't have to pay, I don't begrudge anybody anything. It's a great thing to do and I'm glad that it did happen.

When you look at the levy to anyone else, I really just don't believe that we should be charging the surtax on people. There are other ways of doing things. I think it still is unfair.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. K. PARSONS: I'll tell you a few things you can do, okay? You're asking what to do. We look at this budget and there's a contingency part there with \$30 million. I think that's basically if there's a disaster or if there's some really desperate need in the province.

Do you know what? In this budget right now there is a desperate need. It's a desperate need to save a lot of things that you're cutting. I believe that 54 libraries should never be closed in this province. I believe it's a step backward like you wouldn't believe.

I brought in a petition today from a part of my district. It's the Pouch Cove Library. I happened to have the opportunity to go down and speak to a lot of people that use it. I spoke to the mayor. He was telling me there was so much use in this library that they decided last year, or the year before I think it was, to bring in some money in their budget to help for an after-school program. People were really going there, children were coming home, they were doing their homework rather than go home. We all have reasons. Sometimes it's a lot easier to do your homework somewhere else than it is at home. We all know that because sometimes there can be different things on the go. There were a lot of people taking use of this library.

It's not only the students that were coming after school and doing projects and stuff like this, there were seniors that were using it too. Today, if we look at what's happening in society, our seniors – I laugh at some. I get some messages from people on Facebook. I laugh at this lady or this man that sent me a message. They're a senior and they're really pleased that they're using Facebook and the Internet and stuff like that.

They were telling me at the library that there are a lot of seniors will come in and they'll want – how do I do this? How do I access this? How do I get the information? How do I do my driver's licence online? How do I do this and how do I do different things that they really want to do? I'd say all the rural MHAs can vouch for what I'm saying, that their libraries in their communities are used not just for – it's the centre part of your community, but they're really

getting used to that. I was really amazed with the amount of usage the library was getting.

You asked me what I'd do. The contingency fund you have there, I'd take \$1 million out of it. I'd cut it down to at least \$29 million and I'd save the libraries in this province because it means so much to the people of the province.

I talked to the minister the other day about using libraries and he said we're not cutting them all. The ones in schools, children are going to be able to still use them, but how about after school and how about the seniors?

We're bringing in a seniors' advocate. A seniors' advocate would be great. Anything we can do for our seniors, I really believe in. I know there are a lot of Members who do a lot for their seniors. I know what I've done over the last eight years. I know the response I got at the last election when I knocked on their doors and they were really pleased with what I was doing for them. I know what I'm talking about when I talk about a seniors' advocate.

I do advocate for all the seniors, but we're taking \$750,000 or something like that to do this office. Our seniors would get a whole lot more benefit if we took that money and put it into keeping the libraries. I would bet any money that the 54 libraries that you're going to close down because of this budget that the seniors in this province will use the libraries more than they would use the advocate. Because they're still going to call their MHA and they're still going to want us to do the things we have to go do. So we should, because that's our job.

That would be my suggestion. You asked for suggestions tonight; there's a suggestion. I think if we invested our money – the \$1 million that we could invest would be a benefit.

If you look at where these libraries are getting closed, they're not getting closed in Corner Brook. They're not getting closed in St. John's or Mount Pearl. It's all rural Newfoundland. There are islands that people are going to have to leave. Bell Island is losing a library. I think Gaultois. There's Fogo Island. What are we expecting people to do to access a library?

I told this story a little while ago. My niece's little fellow, you get him to read – it's a job to stop him in the house. He's running around doing his bit of stuff and everything else, but say you're going to the library with his Nan and he puts his coat on and is gone to the library because that's where he wanted to go, a good place to go. He could go over and pick out his book and he would sit down and read.

There were programs there for young children at the libraries. Do you know what? I'm sure that every library we're closing got their own little thing they do for their communities. We're talking small communities in rural Newfoundland.

The library in Pouch Cove, I was told it's about \$10,000 to keep it going. It's the centrepiece of that community. It's where everybody goes. It's where seniors go. It's where children go if they – it could be a problem at home, I don't know; but can you imagine you get a nice, quiet place to be able to go do your assignment, go look up a bit of information. That's what this is all about, giving people that need our help and giving them a place to go. Libraries play a huge role in who we are.

I'm going to get up – I only have 10 seconds left again – but I ask government, look, consider some of the things you're doing, reconsider them. Listen to the people; listen to the people of the province. I mean, everyone out there is not doing this just for badness.

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. K. PARSONS: Okay, thank you.

CHAIR: I remind the hon. Member his time for speaking has expired.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's good to get up again as we talk about the levy bill, we're talking about an income tax bill, it's a money bill, and it kind of gives us a lot of latitude to speak about everything. Most of conversation tonight has been about the finances. One thing I hear said – and I've said this before and I'll say it again – they say our

income tax rates are on par or close to being on par with the rest of Atlantic Canada. I struggle to find what's good about that.

I guess it's fine to say it's not higher than the rest of Atlantic Canada, but we were the lowest. To say now we're on par and people getting up and saying that's a wonderful thing, I don't really see that. You cut income tax; you're putting money into people's pockets, which in turn goes to the economy. I hear criticism, my colleague earlier said – I find that there have been criticisms come over income tax cuts, how horrible it was and now our rates are back to where they were in 2006-2007. It was a terrible thing to cut income tax rates. I have a lot of trouble with that, many ways or many avenues. What's so bad about pumping \$4 billion back into the economy by cutting income tax rates? I'm at a loss to know what's so horrible about that.

All income thresholds were helped – it was low income, middle income, the higher income. Everyone got a break, but at the end of the day there was over \$4 billion that went back into the economy. That's how you stimulate your economy. You can't shut the doors. You can't just say the party's over, it's over. I've had conversations with people and ironically that's somewhat the way I feel, like some of this budget has been implemented.

I was talking to this guy recently and we had this conversation – he made the reference, if I was going to be out of work for three or four months, would I sell my house and sell my vehicle? If I knew I was going to get back to work eventually within a few months, would I sell everything or would I find a way to bridge the gap? I didn't have to answer his question. He told me, I'd find a way to bridge the gap.

As we all know we're a commodity-based economy which, in essence, in years back the fishery could have been considered that but it wasn't. Oil is our true commodity-based economy where we depend on the world oil prices and it has such a huge impact.

If you talk to people, I know last year – I believe it was during the last year or so anyway, I think it was during the general election or whatever, anyway – I talked to this guy from Alberta. We

were just starting to hit – oil was starting to slide. I think it was this past general election.

He laughed. He said this is not a big deal. He said, we're from Alberta, this happen every so often, oil bottoms out. We all know when you live there it will come back. It's familiarity with living in an oil-based economy. Whereas here we're faced with a – as we have all said, no one denies we're in a tough financial position. You don't just close shop; you don't shut the doors on everything. You find ways around it.

In having a commodity-based economy and having us where we are now in the fiscal situation we're in, it's been said many times in this House you don't tax your way to prosperity. I know we're not Alberta, as has been said earlier tonight, but they've used a different model. I realize it's a different population; it's a different economy. The bottom line is what drives their economy is the same thing that drives our economy; it's a barrel of oil. I still believe and we all say it – the saying goes, it didn't have to be this way. We still feel that way. We feel, on this side of the House, it's going to have a detrimental impact on our economy for years to come.

I'm not an economist, but if you look at your economy getting a shock, you can double up the amount of time it takes to get back. So if next year your economy takes a big hit, it could take two years after that to recover. What we're looking at now in our economy, we're not looking at surplus until 2022, so we could be possibly into the next 10, 12 years trying to get back. Even if we run a surplus to 2022, we could be another five, six, seven, eight years or more after that trying to get back to where we need to be.

Ironically, whoever is in power when we get back there, they may look at cutting the income tax rates because it's the right thing to do and you can afford it. They may look at investing in infrastructure because it's the right thing to do and we need it. They may look at all of these so-called waste of money that we hear across the way a lot of times that are terrible things because you can afford to do it.

I like to equate sometimes too – again, you talk about what you considered a waste of money.

When the going was good, if you look back – and you can google it I guess – you go back when we were running surpluses, there were literally – I say it and I don't mean it to play on words – lined up there with their hands out, and all of their requests were valid. I don't think any request wasn't a valid request.

At those times, I worked with the previous ministers and I sat in – and I've said it before – the requests that came through them offices were valid. They were right; hard to say no to them. All the while, there was lots of money. You had a province that never had anything, they would finally find a way and the demands were there. Outside the obvious demands of schools and roads and hospitals and health care equipment, education, there were lots of other things and it was hard to look at any of those people and say you couldn't help them.

Again, I'll say it. I wasn't an elected official at government, but I know some Members here were. Why apologize for that? What was so wrong with what we done? As a government, I don't see anything wrong with it. Actually a lot of those programs, a lot of these investments were something that I think most Members, current and former, are very proud of.

I guess there is more to be proud of than – we look at the situation now, I don't think there is much to be proud of across the way. It's a budget that we were told from the get-go there was nothing good in the budget. By saying there is nothing good in the budget, even the programs that were left in the budget that were already part of it over the years, they are good programs so why not say – at least they are not cut.

We done an awful lot of taxing and other areas, but there are a lot of good things in the existing budget that were already in place. Who cares who brought them in, they were already in place but the public were being told there is nothing good. As I said earlier, it is having a detrimental impact I think on our consumer confidence, which is going to have a very negative impact on our economy.

Something else, too, I will elaborate in my last couple of minutes. We hear there was no mid-year update given during the election call. The Premier, the former Leader of the Opposition,

was calling for an update, but the books were there for everyone to see.

I wasn't an elected Member of this House. I remember when former Minister Wiseman gave the budget. We all knew there were tough times coming. The price of oil bottomed. When the election was called – during the election everyone here, no one knew how the price of oil just hit the skids. There were no secrets. There were no surprises. Everybody knew what we were facing. There was a five-year plan put in place. The deficit did increase because the price of oil did bottom. Everyone knows the price of oil bottomed. During the election, ironically, it plummeted to bring us to this.

So when you hear: We didn't know what we were facing when the election promise was made. We all knew. We all knew what was there. We might be off by – your figures may not be right but everyone knew what was there. It was obvious. All you had to do was pick up the newspaper. All you had to do was go online and you could see the budget document. It's a public document. It has been debated. Everybody knew what was there. So that doesn't really cut it.

To say that no one knew; the bottom line is oil has plummeted. We're in a commodity-based economy. Oil has hit the skids. It will come back. It will take time.

Again, there is no need to close the shop. We are still a very beautiful province. We have a great place that we all should be proud of. We need to do more things to spur the economy and not shut us down. It's too important, Madam Chair. I will speak at my next opportunity.

CHAIR: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member his time for speaking has expired.

The Chair recognizes the Minister of Environment and Conservation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. TRIMPER: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I was thinking that in a few hours I'm going to be talking about greenhouse gases. Speaking of gases, I think there's need for some scrubbers around here.

I want to start off with – I think a key point, the most important reason why we have a levy, why we have a difficult budget, why we have a lot of difficult decisions, and why we are doing them now. I wonder if anybody knows the answer to that question. I found the answer actually several months ago, but I was reminded of it this morning.

I had the honour to kick off Environment Week at Beachy Cove Elementary. I'm in the grade four class. I was invited out there by Paula Courage, a great teacher. We spent an hour with these very enthusiastic kids. There they are, grade four, bright minds. They were showing me their experiments about the environment. I brought some doohickeys, including my electric car. We had a lot of fun with those kids, lots of hugs, lots of great wishes. The emails have been flying. It was just a really good experience, and I look forward to more opportunities like that as a politician.

It was that generation, that class, which is why we have to move. The key thing, as I look at these kids, they're so innocent, they're so excited, enthusiastic about the future; yet, the reality is if we do not move on what we have in front of us, with no action, our net debt will be in the vicinity of about \$50,000 per person by 2022-2023.

Here's these kids – they were, let's say, eight to 12 years of age – some 10 years from now, if we do nothing, we keep doing as we've been doing, spending away, not worrying about ourselves, certainly not worrying about the future and just filling our own pockets, making sure we're enjoying the same kind of lifestyle, the same kind of oblivious attitude towards spending, those kids are going to be – all that innocence will be completely wiped away when they are having to deal with the enormous stress that we're going to put on them, unless we act today. So I say this is all about Beachy Cove Elementary and all those other classes like them throughout the entire province, we need to move.

Thinking about where I'm going to be in about eight hours; if you don't mind, I'm going to try to make an analogy here tonight, this morning, between my greenhouse gas bill that I'm going to talk about in a few hours – I can't wait, I should be nice and crisp – and this amazing financial mess we're in. There is actually a lot of parallels, so pay close attention.

AN HON. MEMBER: Is there a test?

MR. TRIMPER: Well, a bit of a test.

As I said, we have greenhouse gases. Then there's a lot of crazy commentary out there that, frankly, isn't needed. As I said, I suggest we could use some scrubbers. That's what you're going to do to haul down your carbon dioxide and your nitrous oxides. We also use it for sulphur dioxides. You're also going to use it for hysteria. You're also going to use it for falsehoods. You're going to use it for exaggerations. You're going to use it for, as several of my colleagues have pointed out tonight, a lack of alternative suggestions. It's all bad, bad, bad, but really no offering of what else would you do. Well, what we need to do collectively is get on with it. Keep remembering those Beachy Cove kids.

Here's some other –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. TRIMPER: I'll come back to you.

Here's the big issue that's going on around greenhouse gases and climate change. We have a rising sea level. That has come about because as the earth warms, our polar ice is melting. My good colleague and good friend from the Torngat Mountains who depends so much on ice cover, he knows all about the importance of ice. As we lose that ice, we watch the sea level rise.

For anybody who's watching, the Solomon Islands are disappearing. As the minister, I'm watching services that we have provided for many years, and certainly receiving some criticism, are also disappearing. As the islands go, so does my jawbone collection, so does our collection of caribou carcasses and many other features that government used to provide. Unfortunately, we have to retreat to our core

services, our core islands, our core shelters to try to keep going as we get ourselves through this.

Here's another little comparison, not so much greenhouse gas, but it just came up in my thoughts here early this evening; the fact that we are actually a lot like Greece. Our financial situation is such that those lending us money look at us as just one notch above our great friends from Greece. What an honour that is. Here we are just a little notch above junk bond status and everybody keeps saying why do you need to move now? Why do we need to go on this aggressive pace which, frankly, is still going to take us seven years to get to a balanced budget? It's hardly an aggressive pace. Again, I think back to that little classroom this morning at Beachy Cove.

Another analogy, and one that drives me crazy – my office is in the West Block. My good friend here from Municipal Affairs, and I think my other colleague from Transportation and Works who claims he was separated from me at birth, we were twin brothers. We have anti-idling signs up in front of the West Block. Every day I come out of there and I see some dozen cars all sitting there idling away right in front of these signs. I'm going to start taking pictures of them and tweeting them around. I think it might be good.

I bring this point up because it's that same oblivious attitude of just sitting there idling your car, frankly, on a nice day, the same way we've been spending money. Over the last dozen years or even more – I would admit, this has just been going on. It's a legacy of generation to generation, spending, spending, spending. Somebody said tonight we had a revenue problem. We actually don't have a revenue problem. We have a spending problem, and we need to get to the bottom of it.

As with climate change, we keep thinking it's really somebody else's problem. I know one of my key messages tomorrow is for many years this jurisdiction and, frankly, this country, as we live in a relatively wild space, we keep thinking climate change is somebody else's problem. Well, guess what? It's our problem. It's now in our backyard.

Frankly, spending is now in front of us. It's in front of all of us, not just government, Opposition, Third Party, fourth party. We all have to deal with this right now. We're going to debate, but I think there is – I hear a lot tonight about people saying a general acknowledgement that we are in a state and we need to act. We're disagreeing maybe over what we need to do but as I say, we do need to act.

I did talk about the fear and exasperation of doing nothing. Again, as with climate change, people are saying: oh, let's not move now; we can wait; we can let that happen; other people can deal with it. Well, do you know what? Canada's North, Torngat Mountains district is feeling it now. I'm watching it in Lake Melville. My other colleagues from Labrador – frankly, all of us in this province are now starting to document and see these affects.

We are also starting to feel the effects of this budget. As my esteemed colleague has said, the Minister of Education, he's indicated that many times – several of us have drawn the analogy. We now spend more servicing our debt than we spend on educating those fine children at Beachy Cove, and many other classes like them throughout the province.

This is absolutely the oppressive nature that we all walked into in the middle of December – happy days for about two hours. We walked in there, and then in comes Finance and starts laying on the news. I have to tell you, a very sobering walk in that was, as we started to realize, we've got a real situation and we're going to need to act.

AN HON. MEMBER: Wah-wah.

MR. TRIMPER: Wah-wah-wah.

Back to the levy, and I think the most important aspect of the levy – let Hansard show wah-wah-wah. I think I would spell that wan, wan, wan.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. TRIMPER: Back on the levy; it is a shame that we've had to grab a vehicle such a levy to deal with this situation, but the problem is we need the money now.

Mercifully, through the co-operation of good Members of Parliament that represent us, my great friend Yvonne Jones, Judy Foote, Gudie Hutchings, all of these other MPs have done really yeomen service for this province, for this government, for all of us to run to that support.

I know earlier this evening at the start of the debate, it was talked about what we can get out of Ottawa. Well, Ottawa has been stepping up. Thank goodness we have great co-operation to be able to reach in there that now allows three out of four people, three out of four tax filers in this province to not have to pay this levy, this very temporary levy. I think that's a very good thing. We're in good shape.

Anyway, I want to leave you all with a final point. Don't forget those kids and that grade four class at Beachy Cove this morning, all that innocence, energy and enthusiasm. It's all about doing things for them so that innocence isn't wiped away when they become 18 years of age.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Order, please!

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

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

I'm very grateful for the warm reception from government side as they, I'm sure, are looking forward to hearing from me yet again. I have the honour to rise in this House and to speak to this levy bill.

It's an interesting time in our province right now. It's an extremely interesting time and I think it's unprecedented in many ways. Earlier this evening we had our gallery full of citizens. People are sending me emails from –

AN HON. MEMBER: They all left.

MS. ROGERS: They all left. It's late at night and people have to go to work tomorrow, and as we continue on with our work.

People are sending me emails from all over the province because they want to be part of this debate. They want to be part of the filibuster. I'm looking forward, Madam Chair, to be able to read some of the questions.

What I did was I asked people are there any particular issues they would like me to bring to the House tonight on their behalf. The emails are streaming in. People have some questions and some issues they want raised, and I'm very happy to be able to do that.

It's unprecedented. We have people in the middle of the night who are sending us information, sending directly to me saying: Gerry, can you raise this in the House. These are issues we want addressed. That's really interesting. So we have people – the people of the province are in real time participating in our filibuster here this evening. They want to participate in this debate.

We had protesters outside and we had protesters all along the Parkway there putting up posters yet again. They're posters that were taken down for whatever reason, but they were taken down. They're out there now lining the Parkway with posters where they're asking the Premier to resign. It's unprecedented. This is part of democracy at work.

Perhaps we haven't seen in our own lifetimes as much of a pushback as we have in terms of participation by civil society as we did in the moratorium in 1992, our cod moratorium. Not so long ago we had about 3,000 citizens on Confederation Building steps, the steps of our Legislature, saying they were opposed to the levy, that they were opposed to the budget because they know.

They understand how the budget affects their lives. They understand that the budget is not doing what they would hope government would do. The budget is not cutting it for them. The budget is not propelling our province forward. The budget is not propelling our people forward. The budget is not strengthening our people.

There have been protests all over the province. At government offices all over the province, there have been protests. There's currently a petition on the go – and someone said to me just

a few minutes ago that 26,000 people have signed the petition, again, asking the Premier to resign. Now, it's an electronic petition, but people are doing it.

I believe we have to take some message here, and the message here is that people are so incredibly dissatisfied with the budget. Again, I'd like to stress that I do believe people are willing to roll up their sleeves. They're willing to participate either financially or also with their work to try and help work us through this budget, try and help work the province out of this fiscal crisis we're experiencing.

Again, only if it's actually propelling us forward. Only if it's stabilizing our economy. In fact, the measures of this budget, the grim reality of this budget, the Government Renewal Initiative measures of this budget, the grim reality is grinding our economy to a halt, and people know that. They can see it. They can see there's nothing there.

What's going to happen next year? I wonder if the Minister of Finance will be able to stand up and tell us what's going to happen in the budget next year. What does she see for the province next year? What does she see for the province the year after that? What does she see? Does she see more people working? So far they're telling us there are going to be fewer jobs, there's going to be greater unemployment. I wonder.

Imagine if you had children – and it's always risky to try and do an analogy between what's happening in the province and what government is doing, and if you are raising a household budget or a family. Imagine if you had children and you never read to them at night, you didn't send them to any kind of athletics, they couldn't have music lessons, they couldn't have the braces they need, or they didn't have the proper clothing or shoes they need that were really good for them. At the end you would say, but you know what, kids, we saved for your university education. But these kids have been impoverished waiting for that moment.

So money is for something. Money is not just about trying to save money or to try and stop spending money. We realize the very critical situation the province is in financially; but, money is to ensure that our people are well taken

care of. Money to ensure that our province and our communities are strengthened, that our public services are strengthened so that people can be well educated, so that people can get to work, so that people can fully participate in their communities.

Our money is also to make sure that we can drive our cars safely in the middle of the winter. That our roads are clear, that our roads are safe. Money is to make sure that we have libraries so our people can continue to be well educated. Money is to ensure that we have a good health care system.

A budget is not about this line-by-line-by-line miserable, petty accounting process that's gone on, a budget that has no hope or no vision. I did stop, Madam Chair. I did start talking about what we would do differently and I'd like to continue on that. I spoke to some very specific actions we would have taken that would have been different than this government's approach to the budget.

So I'm continuing on. I raised a number of things the last time I spoke. We would have gone for a complete fair tax review. People are willing to pay their taxes when they know that it's fair. We would have done that. We would have done an overall fair tax review, as this government has promised. This government didn't do that before they hit the people with all these extra taxes like the levy, regressive taxes, and with all the extra fees and increased fees. Government didn't do their fair tax review.

It's the same as what happened when they closed schools. We haven't had a school board election in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador – we haven't had an election of school trustees since the year 2009. That's ridiculous. Government promised they would have an election of school board trustees. Instead what they did, they allowed this unelected body of school board trustees to close schools that would really impact communities and really impact children, our children who have a right to good educations.

Those decisions were made by an unelected school board, as was this budget made before government fulfilled its promise of a fair tax review, a complete review of our taxation

system. It's another broken promise, just one broken promise after another after another.

The other thing we would have done is we would have done a complete review of Muskrat Falls. I think government is finally looking seriously at Muskrat Falls. We wouldn't have just simply locked in \$1.3 billion in this budget for Muskrat Falls, no questions asked. So automatically this budget had a line item of \$1.3 billion for Nalcor. We wouldn't have done that. We would have had first a complete review of Muskrat Falls and we wouldn't have just said \$1.3 billion for Nalcor, no questions asked.

We also would have kept the budget simple. Not this flurry of enumerable fee increases or additional fees, a bombardment of tax measures. We would have seriously streamlined the budget so that the budget in fact reflected the values and principles and with the goal of strengthening our people, strengthening our communities, strengthening our public services and making sure that we could get people back to work. Those were the driving principles we would have had behind a budget that we were doing.

What government has done here is almost like scattering shots and confusing people, making people afraid. The other thing we would have done is we would have reviewed all government programs and services.

I see, Madam Chair, my time is out.

CHAIR: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member her time for speaking has expired.

MS. ROGERS: I look forward to standing once again.

Thank you very much.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: Thank you.

I'm just going to speak for a few minutes, Madam Chair. I'm tentatively listening to all the

comments tonight and I can see – I'm just glad the Opposition is finally realizing and admitting tonight that we are in a difficult situation. They understand the levy.

It took a while, Madam Chair, but they understand the fiscal problems. I know a few of them said yes, okay, we understand where the levy is coming from but could there be a better way. I'm just glad that finally after weeks and weeks and weeks they understand the financial crisis we are in.

Madam Chair, this is welcome news that they finally came to reality. That after spending and spending and spending, finally they are realizing we had to stop somewhere. Someone had to take a stand.

Madam Chair, I understand the people in Newfoundland and Labrador. I understand why there is some frustration. I understand why some people are upset with it. I understand why people would say, was there another way? I tell you one thing I am proud of, I'm proud that this Liberal government took a stand.

As the Minister of Environment said, we want to make sure that grade, young people at that age don't have to pay the burden for us here so we can have a much better life and make them suffer in years to come. What a great story that was, Madam Chair.

Why wouldn't you stand up and make a stand. Yes, we all have to suffer a small bit. Yes, we do. Do you think anybody in this province wants to have their children have a worse time in their lives than we did? Every parent's dream is to make their kid's lives better than what we had it. Every kid wants to be better than what their parents had. It's the parent's job and the parents who try to put it in place. This is what this government took a stand on. Did we want to take these tough measures? Of course not.

Madam Chair, I have to say one thing, I'm proud of the Liberal caucus. I'm proud of the Liberal government. Yes, we went through some tough times. Yes, we had a lot of social media. Yes, there were a lot of people in the district, but I can tell you one thing, the majority of places that I went, yes, they said it's tough, but the majority of people I spoke to understood why we did

what we had to do for the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. The number one is for the children of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. That's why I'm so proud of this Liberal caucus.

I heard the Member for St. John's Centre once again talking about the slush fund – \$20 million slush fund. Why doesn't she just someday come over and sit down and look at the money we're leveraging from the federal government.

I heard the Members opposite talking about our federal colleagues. Madam Chair, we just sent up, or ready to be up there – get this, I know the Member for St. John's Centre doesn't want to listen to this because she doesn't want to listen to anything about rural Newfoundland and Labrador. She doesn't want to listen to anything outside St. John's. They just sent up a request and they're on their way – the request for \$140 million spent in capital works in this province.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. JOYCE: One hundred and forty million dollars. That doesn't include – when Minister Foote was down, Judy Foote, we just announced last week \$24 million. That doesn't account for the \$20 million we got for roads and buildings in this province, Madam Chair. That's over \$185 million in capital works, federal-provincial-municipal shares. The Member for St. John's Centre stands up on her little high horse and all she wants to do is talk about doom and gloom.

AN HON. MEMBER: And Alberta.

MR. JOYCE: Talk about Alberta. She's standing up saying look at Alberta spending in infrastructure – \$185 million, not counting Transportation and Works, not counting that. This is Municipal Affairs. These are roads, water and sewer, Madam Chair. You're talking about fire halls. You're talking about municipal infrastructure all throughout. This is what this is all about.

Now, how can someone say we're not stimulating the economy? How can anybody stand up here and say that we're not investing in rural Newfoundland and Labrador? How can they do it? They don't want to look at any good

side of this budget. Everything is all doom and gloom.

Yes, there were tough decisions. I would be the first to admit there were tough decisions in this budget. Madam Chair, let me tell you something – and I hear the Third Party. I'm just glad the Opposition finally stood up and said, yes, the levy was tough but we understand why it was done. I understand. Thank you very much. It's not as bad as it was when we released it. I'm glad they came around.

Madam Chair, the Third Party are always talking about the people, the seniors and the lower income. Not once did they talk about the \$74.6 million for the low income and seniors in this province of Newfoundland and Labrador. That's forgotten. That's a good thing.

MR. WARR: A short memory.

MR. JOYCE: The Member from Baie Verte said a short memory.

I don't even know if they came and looked at it and tried to get a brief on it. I'm not even sure if they came. This is \$74.6 million that the government took and put aside for low-income people of the province, seniors. They weren't even going to be a part of the levy. Yet, there was money put aside for them, but we can't talk about that because that's good news. That's helping people out.

We understand the frustration of people. We understand the frustration, but there are things in this budget that are going to help the economy. I just look at the Humber – Bay of Islands area. I remember when the former minister of Transportation and Works, the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island or whatever it is, cancelled it, two days before the tender. They took back the money. That's a good thing, though; they had it put over in Tony Cornect's district because he was in a bit of trouble. That's where the money went. That's what happened. That's what he did. That's exactly what he did. That's what that man did.

He took away \$500,000 two days prior. That's the kind of politics that was in play in the province. Ask him to stand up if it's not true. I have the documentation. Ask him to stand up.

Here's your opportunity. I will sit down if that Member, who's sitting over there smiling, wants to admit it's not true, how he put people – there was an accident on top of that road on Plant Hill. Let him stand; I'll sit in my seat. Let him stand up and say that is not true. Here's your opportunity. He can't do it, Madam Chair. That's the type of petty politics.

Now, all of a sudden you look at the Bay of Islands there was just a money announcement on the south shore and the north shore, Madam Chair. Money spent on the south shore and the north shore –

MR. BRAZIL: Point of order, Madam Chair.

CHAIR: Order, please!

The Member for Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island, on a point of order.

MR. BRAZIL: I want to correct the Member there; \$500,000 didn't come out of your budget and go somewhere else. You should go and check with the Minister of Transportation and Works and check your budget lines there –

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: That should clarify that.

CHAIR: Order, please!

There is no point of order.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: The Member just stood up here in the House, and we've been told explicitly by the Speaker that if we want to stand on a point of order, we must refer to the Standing Order. The Member referred to Standing Order 36, which is adjournment re urgent matter.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. JOYCE: Madam Chair, that shows the audacity of the Member, making a joke of the safety, making an absolute joke out of safety, where there are accidents on top of that road. He's making an absolute joke and you want to stand here and criticize us giving \$74.6 million to low income. It's a joke what you did. It was shameful what you did and, please, don't stand here and try to be condescending on the people on this side because I know what you did.

I know you put people's lives in danger. I know there was an accident on the top of that road. I know you took \$500,000 two days prior, so please don't make a joke of people's safety, not around me when it concerns the people of the Bay of Islands. Let me tell you, I'm not standing for it. I'm definitely not going to stand for it.

So if the Member wants to stand up and make another big laugh, big laughter about all of that, you go right ahead. You just remember you took an oath. Your oath, Madam Chair, was to protect all residents of Newfoundland and Labrador even in Liberal districts, not take \$500,000 – now over there laughing about it, a big joke, standing up on a Standing Order. It was hypocrisy at its highest level, Madam Chair, and that's why the people in the Bay of Islands, when they all talk about go to your district, when I go to the district and I go up Plant Hill they say we remember when that minister took away the money. We remember what he did to the people of the Bay of Islands.

And if you want to challenge me, let's go out and have a debate. Let's go out in Summerside and have a debate. I challenge anybody right here to do that because they remember the hypocrisy, how they put people's lives at danger, Madam Chair.

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: I won't stand for it here.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island.

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Madam Chair.

It is indeed an honour to stand again and talk about hypocrisy from the minister of Transportation and Works. We'll just talk about some of the things that have gone on here. Let's first talk about some of the issues that are happening right now in Labrador and some of the impacts that this budget is going to have. Then we'll talk about how the Minister of Municipal Affairs doesn't have his numbers straight about Transportation and Works, but he definitely doesn't have them straight about his investment with the federal government and what that means to the people of the province. I will clarify all that later on. He is just a spin doctor and it is nothing new in this House, Madam Chair.

Let's just talk about the emails and the impact that this budget is having on the people of Labrador. We don't hear a lot about what's happening in Labrador. It seems to be silent. It is unfortunate. I know people want to talk about it because it's a great area. There have been a lot of investments done over the last number of years by the previous administration. Not happening the same way here now. It is not happening by no stretch of the imagination.

The Trans-Labrador Highway money, the money is already pre-allocated. I know that because I was there. The minister may talk about where the \$500,000 went. Well, I can tell you where tens of millions went and it went into the Trans-Labrador Highway I can guarantee you and tell you about that.

Let's talk about some of the things that are not going to Labrador right now. Let's talk about the AES offices that are being closed in the coastal areas. Where the Nunatsiavut government themselves are saying the people going to be most impacted by the cuts in Labrador are going to be the people on the coastal areas. They can't just walk down to the next community and get that service; that doesn't exist.

Let's talk about what's being done in Labrador and the impact it is really going to have on the people of Labrador and the settlers and our native communities up there. Let's talk about that. Let's talk about what is happening there when it comes to libraries being closed. And,

again, the 30-minute transportation travel ability to access it, it doesn't exist. It is fictitious. Rose-coloured glasses are being worn on that side, and that's what we've heard for the last number of weeks: rose-coloured glasses.

They don't believe what their own constituents are telling them. They come in and they present petitions where it tells them to get rid of the Liberals. You must go. Stand up; vote the right way. Let's talk about all these because it is fictitious the conversation that's going on, on that side over there.

People come in – fair enough, probably well-intentioned, but obviously not being totally honest with the people here when you come in and present exactly what people are saying to you.

Let's also talk about what's going on in Labrador. Let's talk about the airlift food supplement up there that's gone and trying to be shadowed over by, well, we're going to give some more money on this little side here that may help out if there's some nutritious things that are needed, or if there is something else that needs to be part and parcel of it. Let's talk about some of the travel subsidies, to be able to link the Labrador part to the Island side, to keep that connection between the two. Be it for recreation needs, be it for school trips and these types of things. Let's talk about the things that have been cut as part of that.

Let's also talk about some of the smaller things. It might have been small from a budget point of view but very important particularly to some of the Aboriginal groups up there. I'm just going to read a little letter that was sent to me – it was sent obviously to the Premier:

In the budget you put forth, you made a significant cut to the Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation. Over the last number of years the provincial government have provided \$75,000 to support our recreation program, which was cut without warning. The cut represents a 25 per cent cut of our recreation program for the year, which will have far-reaching effects as to what programs are to be –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: – able to be provided to our youth and we are now left to scramble to find funding sources to cover the deficit.

As you know, we place a great deal of focus on our youth programming as it helps give youth an alternative so they can participate in activities that help them steer clear of the temptation of drugs and alcohol. While I understand cuts have to be made, the fact is we personally met in a meeting in Sheshatshiu and this potential cut wasn't relayed to us, nor were we informed until after the budget that this cut was going to take place.

After this cut was made, the reason we were given for this was what happened was simply that no other group – get it now, no other group – was getting this; therefore, it should be cut. No other group. In Sheshatshiu, one of our key communities that have taken a leadership role to include their young people and that, their money was cut because no other group gets it. So that's what we're doing to fight and bring equality to people in Labrador.

As we are a reserve and much of our funding is fixed, why wasn't this matter discussed with us prior to the budget being handed down as a matter of courtesy and respect. This is from Chief Eugene Hart. There are the things that talks about what we're doing in Labrador, how we're engaging Labrador.

Let's talk about some of the other things that are going on up there. We're talking about the other cuts there for teachers' residence; we're talking about some of the cuts to education on the coastal areas. Labrador is taking a major impact here. People seem to be clouding that over. Again, it's smoke and mirrors that everybody is happy. We're going to do all these things, we're diversifying everything and we're investing into it. We seem to be forgetting a very important part of the province. I don't see the Member screaming and bawling and up telling what needs to be done.

Let's talk about our ferry service. I haven't heard one thing from the Minister of Transportation about what you're doing to improve the ferry service up there.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. BRAZIL: I did it. You want to talk about fiscal responsibility –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: I did an RFP. Where is the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Labrador I put in place, that we had full consultation with all the native communities.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: (Inaudible) place with all the leaders in Labrador from the coastal areas to the North Coast to the West Coast, a big round-table discussion, a whole tabled report put in place ready to go. The election was called; unfortunately, I couldn't move it to the next leg. Seven months later nothing done.

Let's talk about the smoke and mirrors. We have a smoke-and-mirrors thing here. Do you know what the smoke and mirrors is all about? Let's delay everything.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: Let's not put a ferry service process in place. Let's say we're going to do a study on a tunnel and we'll think people will forget about the ferry service that we were working on to improve. That's what this is about. We know that. I've already had conversations with people from Labrador who phoned me about it saying this is what this is. This is smoke and mirrors now. So now you even know there are people who have problems up there. Fair enough, that's where we are with it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: So there's no plan. Obviously, again, no plan on what we're doing for Labrador.

Smoke and mirrors before about all the wonderful things, all the consultation that was going to be done. The Premier is the Minister of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs, but there's no concept here. There's no bringing a plan forward as to how we're going to move Labrador forward, particularly with some of the struggles around the mineral issues up there and the employment. Nothing; nothing is being offered here at all.

I talked about it earlier; we've all talked about it. There's a plan here for nothing. You're flying by day to day. Whatever the next issue is you try to address it, without having a plan to do things. So these are some of the things that are happening.

Let's get back into our education system. The Minister of Education previously said about overcrowding in Beachy Cove. Why wouldn't you do anything about it? Well, do you know what? I did something about it three or four years ago.

It's only six months ago that the Minister of Education was responsible for the area where the school is now being built. That was part of his district. He didn't show up to the meetings with the school boards or the school councils or the public meetings. He'd saunter in later on to see if there was going to be some negativity. He'd stand by the camera to see if somebody was going to try to attack the government or me. When that wasn't going his way, he sauntered out again without anybody seeing him. He didn't stick around to talk to the school council or the hundreds of parents. He didn't even have a discussion around should the school be here? How should we do it? How do we move it quicker?

He never asked questions in here about that. All he said: Why isn't it built? Well, it's being built. Why isn't it built quicker? Because we worked with the town to get the right piece of property to ensure it was done the way we wanted it to be. Now we have a beautiful building, a 34-classroom school being built, five or six months away. A beautiful state-of-the-art building in that community, as we were doing in a number

of other communities as we move things forward.

Like Coley's Point and Riverside Elementary, two schools we were moving forward in our budget lines; on site, things were moving forward.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: The only thing we didn't do, we didn't defer for three years or defer indefinitely. The only things we didn't do. Everything else we were doing. We found the site. We were in the process of design. We even had contractors out for design on other ones. We moved other contracts forward. These were things we had in place.

The smoke and mirrors game here is blame somebody else for not doing something that you guys have cancelled. These are not things we cancelled. I found all the papers here. Not one of these did David Brazil or this administration cancel.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: These are things your administration cancelled. So you can put all the petitions you want and you can argue everything in the world, the issue is this administration cancelled certain projects. These are the ones you cancelled. The evidence is here.

The media now knows about it. The media knows because it's here. Here's what we announced. Here's the work that was in place. Here are the contracts that were in place. Here's what was in our Estimates and in our budget lines. What exists now in this budget line for the Liberals? None of those same projects. The ones they announced are the ones that were already in play, the ones that were moving forward.

Paradise schools, Torbay school, Virginia Park school, Portugal Cove-St. Philip's school, Gander school, these were the schools that were already in play. No vision on investment in the education system. Only smoke and mirrors about

ones that weren't done or weren't at the point where they wanted them; but three years later they're going to say, well maybe we'll go back and look at it. Although three years ago we already had things in play.

It's the same thing with Riverside Elementary, going out and saying, well the design wasn't totally finished. Well, I don't know what to tell you. I left seven months ago, the contract was there. If the contractor didn't do it, I guess it was one of two departments who didn't follow through, the Department of Education or Transportation and Works. I don't micromanage when I'm no longer in government. I had enough trouble when we were doing it when we were in government.

Anyway, thank you, Madam Chair, I'll get a chance to speak again.

CHAIR: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member his time for speaking has expired.

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Torngat Mountains.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I find it shameful, I find it totally shameful that after 12 years in government I have to stand up here and correct the member on Labrador Aboriginality. He talked earlier like he was an authority on it, Madam Chair, an authority. Well, I'd like to tell the Member for –

AN HON. MEMBER: Conception Bay East – Bell Island.

MR. EDMUNDS: – Conception Bay East – Bell Island, that Sheshatshiu Inuit Council doesn't exist. The Inuit are a little further North than Lake Melville. Sheshatshiu is an Innu community. So the reasoning for his arguments, Madam Chair, if he can't present or identify an Aboriginal community correctly, then there's no validity to his arguments.

Let me go a little further. Let's talk about the ferry. Let's talk about the RFP for the district I

represent. If you want to talk about smoke and mirrors, Madam Chair, a transportation committee is not a ferry. It is not even close to a ferry.

He talked about where is it now. It was still there when he resigned. Well, there are 35 recommendations from the former transportation committee that the hon. minister didn't even look at. It's there, it's covered with dust. The recommendations are almost the same, and he has the audacity to stand up and act like he's an authority on the Aboriginal community? Madam Chair, he can't even identify the Aboriginal people correctly. So I put no basis to his argument.

Madam Chair, I still have a few minutes, so I'd like to carry on. I'd like to go back to the comments of St. John's Centre. Nobody is denying the fiscal realities. We're talking about the levy bill and the fact that we've raised the qualification from \$20,000 to \$50,000 before the temporary levy tax is even applied.

Madam Chair, this comes from working with the federal government as opposed to the previous administration that didn't have a working relationship with our federal counterparts at all. We all know what happened there.

Madam Chair, the Member for St. John's Centre also talked about people willing to swallow a bitter pill if we see a cure. Well, we only just avoided bankruptcy and that was the immediate task at hand. We've reduced the budget deficit from a potential of \$2.7 billion to \$1.83 billion. Madam Chair, that's a start.

Working with a co-operative federal government, we have funding initiatives, but the Opposition and the NDP don't want to see this. More importantly, they don't want the people of the province to see this. The people of the province, through this debate tonight, are seeing the real picture. People are beginning to see the stark reality. People in this province are beginning to see beyond what the PCs and the NDP are doing in their best to cover it up. People are starting to see through it, Madam Chair.

The situation in our province is twofold. Number one, we have a huge deficit that, up

until two months ago, would have put us into bankruptcy. We could not let this happen, and we didn't let it happen. Number two, we have to deal with this, and every person in this hon. House has admitted to application of extreme measures – every single person in this House has admitted to the need for extreme measures.

Do you know why? It is because the realization of a \$2.2 billion deficit is finally starting to get through and the Opposition smokescreen budget condemnation is not having the effect that they want it to. We've begun to tackle this deficit by reducing the deficit from \$2.7 billion, if unchecked, to \$1.83 billion. Madam Chair, that is a significant reduction.

The irony in all of this is that the PCs, as well as the NDP, don't want to see deficit reduction, by what they're saying. I say this because they are doing everything they can to stop us from staving off bankruptcy. And all of this, knowing that the former administration is the crowd that actually brought the deficit forward.

Madam Chair, I heard the Member for St. John's Centre talk about they wouldn't have allocated \$1.3 billion to Nalcor. Fair enough, a good statement, but my question is: How would you back it up? There are signed contracts, signed by the previous administration; there was a \$5 billion loan guarantee, a contract signed with Emera and Nova Scotia hydro. All of this would have to be paid back. How would you address the lawsuits if you said, no, we're not going to do anything until there's a review?

To hear the Member for St. John's Centre condemn the start-up work on the fixed link with Labrador, Madam Chair, I feel that I have to again remind the Opposition sides that there are more districts outside of the ones they represent. I'm sure there are a few NDP supporters in Labrador. To see the NDP turn their back shows true commitment to Newfoundland and Labrador, especially rural Newfoundland and Labrador. It's shameful to those of us that look for diversification and it's shameful to those of us that are looking for investment.

At the same time, Madam Chair, they stood in this hon. House time and time again and stood against start-up work on the fixed link. Tourism alone would be a big revenue generator. We plan

to go ahead; we plan to look at this. We plan to go forward because it's a benefit. Everyone can stand up and say that it's a benefit, not only for the Labrador portion of the province; it's a benefit for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I feel that I shouldn't have stood tonight, but with what I'm hearing about the inaccuracies about Labrador and the condemnation of investment that would benefit both portions of our province, Newfoundland and Labrador, to see that condemnation, I felt I had to rise and give a good lesson, after 12 years in government, that they still don't get how the Aboriginal communities works.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Order, please!

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Cape St. Francis.

MR. K. PARSONS: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Again, it is a privilege to get up and to represent the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis and the beautiful people in the District of Cape St. Francis.

I just heard the hon. Member get up – and I know he's a great advocate for Labrador and so is yourself, Madam Chair, and the Lab West Member and the hon. Minister of Environment, but the funny thing about it is there are four of you guys that are from Labrador but neither one of you are the minister that represents Labrador. And that's a sad thing. We have four good Members in the House of Assembly, like you guys, and ladies, that are here from Labrador; you should be the ones to represent Labrador in the Cabinet. That is just my opinion. I think you are good advocates for Labrador and you should be the Member that should represent Labrador.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. K. PARSONS: No, if you look at who's in charge – what minister is for Labrador Affairs, just tell me that one?

Anyway, I'm going to get on with my speech right now.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. K. PARSONS: Yeah, it's the Premier. I think that one of the Members from Labrador –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. K. PARSONS: Not like one of you guys should be.

I'm going to get on with my speech now. The thing that I really believe and I heard here tonight – so many Members got up here tonight and they all spoke about when I go back to my community, all I'm hearing is this and I'm hearing that. You have to get your heads out of the sand. You really do have to get your heads out of the sand.

An Angus Reid poll came out only last week and showed that the least popular premier in the province is here in Newfoundland and Labrador now; went from 60 per cent in the polls. I don't know who you're talking to. I know who I'm speaking to and people are very, very upset but if you look at the polls, just look at this, people are not happy. I don't know where you're getting this to. I don't know where you're getting it to.

I know you're hearing it in your districts. You just can't get up in the House of Assembly and say, b'y, everything is good; I went to every table down in Twillingate the weekend. I went around and there were places blocked with tables and not one person in Twillingate this weekend was against this budget.

AN HON. MEMBER: Who said that?

MR. K. PARSONS: The Minister of Transportation said – he was up tonight – he went to every table. He said he went around he visited every table. He said he visited every table there and there was no one in that hall that said anything bad about the budget.

Well, let me tell you something now. There was a poll on VOXM, like I said earlier today, and I looked at it –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR (Warr): Order, please!

MR. K. PARSONS: Okay, you don't believe the poll. I'm only just telling you there are 28,591 people who voted on it.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. K. PARSONS: I don't know how many people voted twice. I don't know how many did whatever, but that's a lot of people that are voting.

So you still believe – there's a petition out there with 16,000 – just a petition with 16,000 –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. K. PARSONS: – names on it. They don't mean anything; none of them mean anything. Look, all I'm saying here tonight, I'm not saying polls should be taken and should be the rulebook, but listen to the people. You're in the House of Assembly tonight, when we get a minister get up and say that he was sitting with 180 people and not a person in that place said anything bad about the budget, I find that hard to believe.

And when you say you go back to your districts and everyone knows, oh, it's the bad PCs who did it all. The bad PCs, they're the ones that did it all. That's all you're hearing here. It will be interesting to see what the next polls come out and show. It will be very interesting.

I can tell you one thing, though, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are good people. I have to say they are good people. There's no doubt about that whatsoever and maybe they are being nice to you. I don't know, I don't see them all being nice to you but maybe that's the case because a lot of them are good people. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are the best people in the world. I will always believe that.

But what's after happening to your government over the last six months, people have lost trust. How often do you hear the word trust? I trusted

them; that's what I hear. I trusted them to make decisions that were going to be good for us. They made promises, here's what they promised, and now they broke every promise that they had.

The HST – no, that's a job killer. We will promise you – I'm a man of my word, that HST is a job killer and we won't see it. There'll be no layoffs – promised no layoffs. We see 650. Well, we didn't really say that; we just said this.

Just look at it, a little promise. I laughed the weekend when I was to one of the functions, a lady said to me they couldn't even promise – the Premier got up in the House of Assembly and said I will let the people of the province know when we're going to vote on the budget. He said we're going to give them 24 hours' notice. He stood up in the House of Assembly and told someone that.

I don't understand why it changed. The House Leader sent an email the day before to us. The reason – now, this is what it is. He said we were the ones who should have told them, not us. But you made a promise to the people that you were going to let them know and give them 24 hours' notice that you were going to have the budget vote. That is a promise.

You may look at me, Minister of Fisheries, and say, well, b'y that's not much of a promise, but people trust you. People trust you to keep your word. That's what it's about. You've lost the trust of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador because they trusted you. You went and knocked on their doors election time and you told them: This is what we're going to do. We're going to build a new Waterford Hospital and it's going to start right away. We're going to do that because that's the right thing to do. We have a plan to build a Waterford Hospital. I don't think that plan can true.

I know the Members on the West Coast, and I understand that too, they promised they were going to have a hospital started this year. I'm sure that was a big promise too.

When you make a promise to someone, you tell somebody you're going to do it, and then you don't do it. You guys came into the election – and there's no doubt in my mind; I knew it and I

can say the truth here tonight we knew it was going to be some job for us to form the next government. People had their minds set. There was a wave going. It's the way politics happens anyway. Politics, as far as I'm concerned, works in some kind of a cycle. That's the way it works.

People in Newfoundland and Labrador were promised that you were going to be there for them, the promises you made to them they could trust you. You can take it to the bank; we're going to do this. We're not going to raise your taxes. It's going to be a stronger tomorrow.

Every senior I talked to – whose tomorrow I don't know how long that'll be – they don't think it is. We look at some of the things that are being done in this budget: cutting libraries and increasing gas by 16.5 cents hurting small business; the tourism industry, one of the biggest industries in our province – we've done a great job.

Do you know why our tourism industry is so good? It's because of our people. We have a product. The product we have is beauty and the beauty is in our people. Every time a tourist comes down on the wharf and there's someone there at a few fish or whatever, people really want to talk to them. That's who we are as people. That gets talked about. You go to Newfoundland and Labrador and they're the friendliest people.

Now, we've increased gas so that we're the highest place in all of Canada to operate a vehicle. Do you think that has an effect? It definitely does. It's going to have an effect on an industry that we built up over the years that right now it's over a billion-dollar industry.

Look what you're doing. Our tourism industry, you're going to hurt it. We heard stories tonight about young professional people and whether they want to stay here anymore. I talked to a young doctor, a young guy; he's going to be a doctor. Only a short time from now, he'll be a full-fledged doctor. He doesn't know whether he's going to stay here – is this the place I want to raise my family? Five years ago, three or four years ago it definitely was. You talked to teachers and stuff like that this is where they wanted to go.

This is all about choices. You made choices in this budget that are hurting individuals. You're taxing people to death. I've got up and I said this before, and I've heard it again. People may not like it, and it's a general conversation that's out there. It's too much, too fast – too much, too fast – but you won't listen.

We got Members on the other side presenting petitions against their government, and then they can sit down and say, b'y, I did my job; I presented that petition. How about the thousand names on the petition that are not telling you – they are the people you should be representing; they're the people you should be stood up speaking for: the people that you're presenting these petitions for. But you just don't listen. You're not going to listen and that's it.

People say to me: Is there anything we can do? I say: I really don't think so because they won't listen. They're in a bubble and they don't see outside that bubble. I can't believe it.

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. K. PARSONS: Thank you.

They don't want to hear it.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is a pleasure to stand once again and speak to Bill 14, An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act and specifically the levy.

Mr. Chair, this time I'm actually going to talk about the levy, what's in the bill. That would be a nice thing to do. So, in terms of the levy, I guess it's fair to say that it's been the lightning rod; there's no doubt about it. Although it really is part of the whole cumulative impact and that piece, obviously, that we have concerns about. The levy itself, no doubt, has been an issue.

I would say upfront, to be fair, that there's no doubt that in terms of the levy, the levy never did apply to low-income seniors. That's something that was put out there by the government side, but maybe not by the Opposition, whatever. I acknowledge it; it was

good. They actually put in a measure for low-income seniors that they wouldn't have to pay the levy, and that's a positive thing.

As a matter of fact, the Home Heating Rebate and the seniors' supplement and so on are actually being replaced with an enhanced seniors' supplement. Seniors will be better off, low-income seniors, and that's a good thing. That's a good thing and I certainly acknowledge it, absolutely, 100 per cent, but at the time, at least, that's where it ended. Of course, then we had everybody who wasn't a low-income senior were going to be hit with the levy.

We know that since that time, thankfully the federal government did come through with a deferral. They didn't give us any money, but a deferral. It's still a good thing, a deferral of money owed to them until, I think, 2022. As a result of that, they were able to lift the cap to \$50,000. I will be the first person to say once again that was a good move. That was a positive move and I certainly acknowledge that. I acknowledge Minister Foote and whoever else, the other MPs who did that. I absolutely support it, and it's a good thing. I never questioned it once. I said from day one when the announcement came out it was a good thing and I support it 100 per cent.

However, the reality for many people in my district – and I'm sorry if some people take offence to the fact that I actually have people in my district that make a decent income, if I have teachers and nurses and RNC officers. I guess they're not allowed to make a decent income. In some people's minds they're the rich. I've heard people say oh they're rich; you have all the rich people.

I wouldn't consider them rich. They're making \$70,000, \$80,000, \$90,000, good money – making good money. Absolutely they're making good money, but they also have expenses. Somebody living in Southlands, as an example, you can't get a house there for less than \$400,000 or \$500,000. That's the going rate. I'm not making it up. They're not rich. It's only like a regular home. A little larger than some homes perhaps, but they're not mansions or anything. That's the going rate.

Taxes that they're paying the City of St. John's; they're paying, I don't know, \$3,000 a year or whatever in taxes or more – \$3,000 or \$4,000 a year. They just got hit with a big municipal tax bill when the municipal taxes went up. They probably have a couple of cars because the husband and wife are probably working wherever and they need a couple of cars. Yes, they have a few things around them.

Then again, many of these people went to university or whatever the case might be, or they went to Holland College as an RNC officer or whatever. They got their training and they had to pay their student loans and all that kind of stuff and now they make a good living. Well, good, they deserve to make it. They deserve to make it, but you still have to factor in that by the time you look at the bills they have to pay, you can't look it and say they are making a good salary. That means they have lots of money, they can absorb it. That's not necessarily the case, because people are living the lifestyle based on the incomes they make. That's what they are doing.

Now some people could argue, maybe they're living beyond their means or they should have had savings and all that. It's great to say it, but that's not necessarily reality. There are a lot of people I've had discussions with who said this is really going to put a major strain, not just the levy but the cumulative effect of all the taxation. The cumulative effect is going to put a significant strain on their income. It's going to put a significant strain on their expendable income, on the ability for them to maintain what they have around them. To keep their kids in dance or sports or hockey or whatever the case might be, it's going to have an impact.

Some people have told me they're already just tittering on the edge and this could put them over the edge. Actually put them over the edge. Then there are other people who can absorb it and they are not going to file bankruptcy as a result but it's taking away a big junk of their expendable income.

Now, if it takes away their expendable income then you have to ask yourselves, if they don't have that extra money, that expendable income, then that means they're not going to the store and buying certain things. They're not making

the repair on their patio deck or putting in those new windows. They're not purchasing a new vehicle. They're not maybe doing a staycation perhaps or vacation. They're not going out to a nice restaurant every now and then for a meal or going out to the movies, all those things. That has to have a negative impact on the businesses – it has to.

If you don't have the money and you're not going to – if you had a restaurant, I'll just use the Keg as an example. It could be any restaurant, but I'll use that as an example. A lot of people go there. Well, obviously they have a big facility, a big restaurant, a lot of staff. A big facility to maintain, they do well. If all of a sudden half of the people that are going there could no longer afford to go there, how long would it be before they had to scale back on staff and possibly shut the restaurant down? I hope it doesn't happen, I really do, but it could happen. It would seem to make sense that it could happen.

You have to look at the whole trickle-down effect, even on municipal taxes. I think I heard the City of St. John's – and I stand to be corrected. I'm pretty sure I heard a news release maybe three weeks ago or a month ago, whatever, from the City of St. John's saying that this budget is going to cost them \$4 million.

You have to remember, they have to pay insurance on all their vehicles. They have fuel, they have all this stuff. They purchase all kinds of supplies and whatnot. So this is going to have an impact on municipalities. In this case it's the City of St. John's. They said \$4 million, I'm pretty sure was the number.

Where do you think they're going to get that money from? The residents of St. John's just had a big tax increase. So if they're short \$4 million because of this, where are they going to find that \$4 million. It's a good chance they're going to charge that back to the citizens again and it's still only the one taxpayer. You can look at all the different municipalities. It's going to have an impact.

You look at businesses and so on, there are a lot of businesses that if they've got to – I don't know, if you have a business perhaps that vehicles are used as part of your business,

whether it's a courier service or I don't know, lawn care companies, taxis, whatever, and the fuel and insurance on those vehicles are part of your business and all that goes up, well then what are they going to do? They're going to pass it on. They have to pass it on. They're going to pass it on to the same people that are getting hit with all the taxes.

These are just some of the issues that people are telling us. I'm not imagining or making them up. Nobody here is making them up. We're getting the emails and the conversations. I know everyone else is getting them too. I'm not trying to beat up on anybody – I'm not. I agree with a lot of the stuff you're doing. I understand you have to do a lot of the stuff, totally agree, but are we going too far. The question is, are we going too far. That's the issue.

I will continue on with that message for the next number of times I speak.

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. LANE: Thank you.

CHAIR: Order, please!

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

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

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

I'm very happy to speak yet again at this late hour. It's 1:23 in the morning.

I can hardly hear myself speaking here, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

I ask all Members to respect the Member who has been identified to speak.

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

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

Once again, I'm very happy to stand and speak to the Liberal levy bill. It's 1:24 in the morning. People might wonder, why are we doing this? What is the urgency? Well, the urgency, in fact, Mr. Chair, is that this budget is so regressive and it has no vision for the people of the province.

I keep thinking, for the Minister of Finance, what is her budget going to look like in six months? The other question I have is, what is her budget going to look like a year from now? What is her vision down the road?

Again, all that we hear about are cuts, cuts, cuts, more fees and extra fees on top of the existing fees. We see no plan for diversification. We see no plan for population growth strategy. We see no plan for that in the budget. There have been no specifics around how this government is going to grow the economy.

What we do know on page 5, they're telling us the economy actually – because of the measures – will shrink. This is not a budget for growth. This is not a budget that will stabilize the economy. This is a budget that will shrink the economy. That will stifle the economy and that will stifle the people of the province.

What I did earlier this evening, Mr. Chair, when I knew that, in fact, we would speaking to this bill way into the night, I sent a message out via social media inviting people to send me issues they would like addressed in the House. So I received a number of responses. Some are short, some are quite long. I would like to start reading some of those.

This is the wonderful thing about democracy, Mr. Chair, this is the wonderful thing about social media, is that average citizens are actually partaking in our filibuster here tonight. Citizens are actually partaking in real time in our debate. I would like to read this particular one.

Hi Gerry, I am a single parent with three children. I have been receiving CPP Disability Benefits for the last 10 years. My benefits total \$9,400 annually. I also receive child benefit payments from government, but still it is very challenging to survive and provide everything

my kids would like to have. I worry how I will manage with the increase in gas tax, increase in HST, taxes on insurance, increase in so many fees, such as car registration. Everything that is a necessity we are paying more for.

I find that interesting. She's saying everything that is a necessity in her life she now has to pay more for. None of this is about frills. None of this is about things that don't matter in her life. She's a mom; she's a single mom. She has kids. She needs a car. She needs gas. She needs insurance on her car. She needs to register the car. She needs house insurance. So I find it very interesting that she says: everything that is a necessity we are paying more for.

She has always paid it, but now everything that is a necessity we are paying more for. This is a woman who basically is living under the poverty line: The price of healthy food is already high enough now. They are driving people to put garbage in their kid's stomachs, because at the end of the day it's the only place to cut costs. Why not tax the unhealthy – now this is her letter. Why not tax the unhealthy junk food that causes medical issues which leads to people needing more from our health care system? It's a good question, Mr. Chair. It's a really good question.

Tax tobacco and alcohol – we do that already, but she's saying raise their prices, they strain the health system. That seems like a reasonable thing to do. From this woman's perspective who is struggling, she's saying, everything that is a necessity she now has to pay more for.

She says: Gerry, I wonder what kind of a future we have in Newfoundland and Labrador. I would haul up roots and move but I cannot afford to. Unfortunately, you are not my representative. It is another Member of this House whom I do not trust or respect. I have been an NDP supporter for some time now and I have a feeling more people wish they were too. My disability does not allow me to attend rallies but I am there in spirit and hope you will continue to fight this crazy budget.

That's from a single mom with a disability who's trying to raise her children. Again, I was struck by this line: everything that is a necessity we are paying more for. She has no choice

because these are items that are of a necessity to her and she's paying more for as a result of the budget.

Now the interesting thing is all her costs are going up but her income is not going up. This budget offers her nothing in terms of increase in revenue or any other kinds of supports that would help her. That's how this budget is affecting this particular family.

Here's another one: Gerry, it's mind-boggling that this government doesn't comprehend the high cost, the real expense and economic strain that the budget will create. Mental health needs will soar, as will serious and petty crime and illiteracy. How do they not see that the health of people will be directly impacted by divesting in literacy, education, health care and incentives to move forward?

It's very interesting, because the Canadian Medical Association has identified all these issues, and particularly affordable housing as well. We see there is nothing in this budget to help in the area of affordable housing with extra rent supps. There were no extra rent supps in this budget, although we see more and more people aging. We have the highest number of seniors in receipt of OAS and GIS. Their income is really limited. So we have more and more people aging into that category. A lot of them are women who are widowed or single. They have no way to increase their income.

The year before we had no increase. The past administration didn't increase the number of rent supps. The longest waiting list for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, which also includes rent supplements, are seniors and single people, single older people who cannot afford their apartments.

We have no rent control or no rent stabilization in the province. So their rent is going up. The price of food is going up. They no longer have their over-the-counter medication they need. That's wiped out. So they have to pay for that and their rent is going up, but their income is not. Many men who are slipping into the age of 65, their income is actually going down.

Incredibly mind-boggling she says. How do they not see that the health of people will be directly

impacted by divesting in literacy, education, health care and incentives to move forward? It's so incredibly mind-boggling she says. A balance sheet without context. Where is the governance? Thank you.

That's one of the things I've mentioned a number of times, Mr. Chair, is that it seems what government has done is actually an exercise in accounting. It's not an exercise in governance. It's not a budget about looking at where we're going to be in three years from now or four years from now or five years from now. It's not about looking at our communities and what they need. It was simply line-by-line-by-line accounting and cutting. She sees that as well. This is a balance sheet. She said this budget is not a budget with vision. It's not a budget about governance. It's a balance sheet without context. Where is the governance?

It's interesting, a number of these – and I have a number of emails that have all come in this evening, people who want their issues brought forth in the House. What I find interesting is each one has one little gem in it, aside from the narrative that they present, a balance sheet without context or I'm paying more for things that are a necessity.

Mr. Chair, thank you very much.

CHAIR (Bragg): Order, please!

The Member's time for speaking has come to an end.

MS. ROGERS: I look forward to getting up and speaking to this again.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Order, please!

The Chair recognizes the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning to you.

CHAIR: Good morning to you.

MR. KENT: It's so nice to see a smiling face in the Chair who appears to be bright-eyed and bushy-tailed at the early morning hours.

Mr. Chair, I'm glad to have a chance to speak further to Bill 14. One of the things I committed doing early in this debate is sharing some perspectives from people who are getting in touch with us. We've all received dozens and dozens – I'd go as far as saying hundreds of emails from people. So I'm going to share some of that.

In the meantime, I know the Finance Minister is here and following debate. There was a question actually asked to me momentarily on social media about the levy. I'm going to pose the question and I'm hopeful that at some point the minister or somebody on the government side may be able to clarify. It pertains to Labrador. We have several Labrador MHAs here as well. So maybe they can provide an answer as this debate continues.

What I was asked was: Can you question if the levy will be put in place before or after the Northern resident deduction is considered. This is an important question. To be put on par with the rest of the province, it should only be considered after the deduction.

MR. LETTO: Mayor Vardy sent the same message.

MR. KENT: The Member for Labrador West is saying that Mayor Vardy sent him the same message. Mayor Vardy has just asked me the same question. So I'd welcome hearing from the Member for Labrador West or from the Finance Minister on the answer to the question and happy to pass it along on behalf of Mayor Vardy. I'm glad the message has gotten through to his MHA, and hopefully we'll hear a response shortly.

I'm going to start with a note we received prior to the budget vote. It went to all MHAs, and it's from a citizen who has been a vocal advocate over the last couple of months on a whole bunch of issues related to this budget. It reads as follows: Members of the House Assembly, I urge more than a cursory glance, I'll try to be brief. Arguably, the major draw for most of you to support the budget is your salary and your

party affiliation, your career. Now, before you deny it, do yourself a favour and pause to reflect on this seriously. It's perfectly understandable to swallow the unfavourable for the sake of a job. We look the other way, we cut corners, we sigh and carry on when our income is at risk. It's a sad reality and we can't fault you for it. I would argue on point of ethics and integrity, but I promised to attempt brevity – another time perhaps. Instead, let's focus on that bottom line, the income, the career, the bread on the table.

Certainly, by staying the course, following the status quo and supporting the budget, you could guarantee a juicy salary and perks for four years right. Let's ignore the impending revolution for now for this hypothetical. That's half a million dollars over a few years and all you have to do is toe the party line, but what about what happens next. I can say with certainty that any politician fool enough to support the budget would never take office, which means no chance at the pension for first time holders of office.

What about outside of politics then? Having made nearly the entire population of the province your enemy, how many job opportunities will be lost? How many will shred your resume just to avoid the public backlash? Even if you do find a new career, what will it be like to live in the province you played a role in crippling? What if you need medical help in a crippled health care system? Or have children attending a broken school system? How will it feel to walk through the cities that are shadows of themselves in your wake?

Let's look at –

MR. CROCKER: Come on, you're better than that.

MR. KENT: The Minister of Fisheries is saying come on, you're better than that.

I'm sharing concerns that have been expressed by people of the province. I'm not saying I endorse every word in these messages I'm presenting, but people have asked to have their views heard. So I think that's legitimate, and, Mr. Chair, that's what I intend to do during this debate, is pass along some of the concerns and ideas and questions that have been presented by

citizens. If Members don't like that, that's unfortunate, I'm still going to do it anyway.

Let's look at the more positive perspective, standing with your people and voting no. The House shares the opinion of the people. No confidence, and an election begins. Certainly your seat isn't guaranteed, but I would think that any MHA of such integrity and strength of character is in a strong starting position. Actions speak louder than words, and a no confidence vote for the House means a gain of confidence in our MHAs. Even if unsuccessful in the election, the exposure and good press from taking a stand would be a long-standing benefit to any career.

The individual who wrote this goes on to suggest that maybe it's time we even abolish the party system and that every Member of the House of Assembly should be independent. In the Territories there are jurisdictions where that actually is the reality. Maybe based on our political history that's not practical here. Maybe based on our size it's not practical here, but anyway it's an interesting viewpoint that this individual has put forward.

Let me share another one. This one is addressed to the Premier and the Finance Minister. I may not have time to finish it but I'll at least get through some of it.

I think one of the reasons your constituents are so irate is because all the time and efforts people have put in to be heard have been ignored. All that you say is, we've had to make some tough decisions and it's only temporary. There's no compassion or recognition of understanding how some people will find this additional money. I have never seen a Finance Minister so cold and cruel.

If you use the formula created and put in a few low and middle-class salaries to see how this impacts some families that would let you know how much you are burdening people. You said you wanted to raise the HST so we could be in line with the rest of Atlantic Canada and so you did; however, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick both do their income tax increases much differently, but I imagine you both already knew this.

In those provinces, anyone making over \$150,000 are taxed 21 per cent, and in New Brunswick anyone over \$250,000 are taxed 25 per cent, which I believe the rich in this province are taxed at 17 or 18 per cent. I stand to be corrected – pathetic. Why did you not bring our high-income earners up to where these provinces have them? Do you really have to bring people to despair to accomplish your goals? Like the Harper government did, by the time you both are finished the damage will already have been done.

I am very worried about two of my children. They both take home much less than they make. One of them is a single parent with two children, one of whom has special needs. His mortgage is well over \$1,000 a month and his daycare is almost \$900 a month. Some paydays he has nothing left over and we have to buy him gift cards to buy groceries.

Can you explain to me how he is supposed to come up with additional money to pay all the additional taxes and levy? I'm nearly out of my mind with worry about this and don't know how we can help him anymore than we are doing right now, plus pay this ridiculous levy ourselves when we are seniors on a fixed income. I really don't think you understand or you would be trying to revisit some of this.

All bonuses and raises for the six-figure salary people, I don't care if they are judges or who they are, should immediately be frozen until such a time as government is on its feet. If you are taking jobs away from family people and rolling back wages, then there is no excuse to inflate salaries of these people. In future, these bonuses, raises, pensions and severance pays should not be included in hiring contracts. These already pensioned people are already double-dipping when they are hired and should be happy with just a salary.

I'll skip some of the personal commentary on the Finance Minister, but she goes on to say: She says the levy is only temporary but people still have to find additional money in the meantime to pay this unfair tax, and multiply this over a period of the next couple of years adds up to a lot of money. It is an unfair burden when you could have raised revenues in other ways.

The big gas tax should also be linked with the price of oil. As that goes up, the tax should go down; it's only fair. I heard the Finance Minister earlier today say it would be inefficient at this point to attempt to put a tax on junk food instead of books. Well, as far as I'm concerned it is even more inefficient that this wasn't thought about in the first place.

Now, a comment directed at the Premier: It takes a big person to admit that he's made a mistake and an even bigger man to fix it. The levy and the gas tax could have been done differently, and I think at the end of the day you know this. You had the power to bring it in, now use your power to fix it, because I don't think you are cold or cruel. Rome wasn't built in a day so this problem won't be fixed in one budget, but you need to do this gradually without bringing people to despair.

That's just a reflection on how lots of people feel, Mr. Chair. I know it's upsetting some Members opposite, but the views of the people of the province need to be heard during this debate and I look forward to presenting more of them as the night continues.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's good to get up again to continue on the debate on the levy, of course, as we get into the wee hours. I want to go down – I have lots of emails I can read too, so the Member for Labrador West would like a lot of them. I don't know if I have any from Labrador or not, but I have one from concerned residents.

I'd like just to talk about some direct impacts of the budget to various groups, Mr. Chair. We look at the new seniors' Income Supplement, they say seniors fair better but there's still elimination, with the elimination of the Home Heating Rebate and the Income Supplement, but there are direct impacts on the budget.

You have eliminated the Home Heating Rebate but there are other things hidden in there too. The introduction of a two-hour cap on homemaking hours under our Home Support Program. They eliminated the adult drug program coverage for clients of the Newfoundland provincial drug program under the access and 65 Plus program. They reduced the Community Healthy Living Fund and reduced the age-friendly transportation program.

In one aspect they banter and they say seniors are better off under this new Income Supplement. When you compare the two programs they cut to make this new one – okay, we'll take them at their – they are showing figures that say seniors are better off that way, no problem.

They never mentioned these cutbacks, these other affects to seniors that is not included in the money. They say they'll take home more money per month but then this stuff here will whittle away at that extra money they're supposed to be taking home. Look at the eliminated adult drug program coverage for clients.

All of those changes to a senior on a fixed income, in one hand you're giving them more money than they would have had in the supplements, yet you're eliminating this. That wasn't part of the other plan. So are they really better off at the end of the day? I'd like to see some analysis on that, are they better off? I question that, Mr. Chair.

We get to the students. This budget has reduced the grant portion of the Student Financial Assistance Program; reduced department school supplies budget; increased cap sizes for grades four to six from 26 to 28, grades seven to nine from 29 to 31; increased cap sizes for French immersion in grades four to nine; will implement the combined grades combination from grades one to six; elimination of teacher positions.

The number seems to be – we're floating with the numbers – 200 plus, then we are adding more teachers in, but regardless, there's a net loss of teachers; the operational grant to MUN has been reduced by \$14 million; reduced funding to Sport NL, SportFest Stars and Legends; reduced funding to Rec NL programs;

eliminated the Jumpstart program. These affect our younger population, our students, our youth.

I'd like to jump – no pun intended – to the Jumpstart program. That's a great program. I heard some Member opposite, I can't remember, it was said recently: Why don't Canadian Tire fund this? We're jumping on the Canadian Tire bandwagon.

The Canadian Tire fund is quite well. I think everyone should research the Jumpstart program because I don't think there is anyone in this House who can honestly criticize Canadian Tire for what they do, what this program is intended for. It's for the underprivileged to help them get involved in sport, to help them with their registration, to help them with their equipment. I could care less where the equipment comes from. This corporation has taken on this initiative, and it's been a very successful initiative.

We matched – I can't remember if we exactly matched, we were one of the bigger donors to this Jumpstart program and the results were phenomenal. The uptake on the program, it was very successful. It helped people who are underprivileged, who couldn't afford it. As we all know, it's not cheap to have your child involved in sports, especially when you look at hockey and other sports.

If you look at it on paper, this is a lot of money going to the Canadian Tire Jumpstart Program, but money cannot replace what joy and benefits it gives to those children. I know everything is dollars and cents, but unfortunately sometimes with our youth we put too much – the dollars and cents, the bottom line of balancing the books sometimes outweighs the importance of what these programs bring to our children. I respectfully understand the government opposite's dilemma of trying to balance the books, trying to find money, but I question a program like the Jumpstart program which I think is a great program.

You look at the other reductions, the Sport NL SportFest Stars and Legends, it's huge. All of these things I just listed off affect our youth, from our school-age children up to our university children. I don't think at any time we should be cutting funding which benefits youth.

To me, our students and youth are our future. If anything, we need to be – two different ends of the spectrum, I guess.

We can't forget our seniors. We have an aging population, but on the other side we have students and young people who need a fresh start too. That's why we always say – I may have said it before – it needs to be more balanced. You can't be too hard on any group. You need to be fairer to the groups that can afford it which is the middle, higher income. Even the middle income, this budget has an impact on.

It's a pretty delicate balance, but I really question when you're cutting programs such as the Jumpstart program, SportFest, Recreation Newfoundland programs, you're getting into the bread and butter issues, Mr. Chair.

We've gone from seniors to students. Families; when we say families, what's a greater indicator in families than the gas tax of 16½ cents. As we all know, most households now are a two-vehicle household. In my District of CBS, most people commute to the city. As we said, it has been said in this House, you're looking at probably \$10, \$15 a tank of gas extra. If you look at a household with two vehicles, you are looking at roughly in the vicinity of \$25 to \$30 a week. You take that by 52, you have a new levy.

The HST increases to 15 up from 13. It's something Members on this side have said repeatedly earlier tonight. We had planned to do that. It was supposed to kick in January 1. It would have created an extra \$100 million, possibly even \$110 million, depending. That was a missed opportunity. Now it will kick in July 1. We lost that chance for revenue. Maybe it could have prevented some other cuts in the budget or changes in the budget had that been left in place for January 1. Most people were accepting of it. Again, they were accepting of an HST increase kind of by itself or with a couple of other measures, not with everything that's in place there now.

We have the levy. The levy is for over \$50,000. When you look at \$50,000, there was a time when that was a decent wage. You look at it now, we're getting into \$50,000 with the levy. Sure, it starts lower but you're getting right into

the core of the middle class with this levy, right to the bitter core.

As we all know, households now with two and three children with a home and vehicles, \$50,000 is not a lot of money. I don't think anyone in this House can dispute that. You started at \$50,000, no doubt, it's a lot better than starting at \$20,000. I'd be the first to give you credit on that, but you're still hitting hard the middle class.

Again, you're hitting families. I'll say it again, and I'll continue to say it, insurance tax – July 1 will be a huge impact on people. I'm talking about families. We're looking at, as I said, the gas tax, HST, auto insurance, all the personal income tax plus the 50 new fees. That's just for families. I mentioned seniors and students prior to that.

When we say here and Members opposite, Members on this side of the House say over and over again, it affects every single person in the province. I'll get up again to speak. We have other areas, but there are no truer words ever said, it does affect every single person in this province.

As my time wraps up, thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: Thank you.

The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

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

I'm happy to stand here tonight in this House and speak to Bill 14, which is the Deficit Reduction Levy.

Right now in the House, just for people who may be listening – and if they are, they must really have trouble sleeping – it's 1:54 a.m.

I'm happy to stand and speak in this House at any time to talk about the different things that go on in this House. What I wanted to do right now, I've had an opportunity to listen to various Members opposite, make comments over the last number of hours. I like the opportunity to listen to what they have to say and point out a few things to people, because not everything that's

said is always – people need to understand context, is the way I'll put it, Mr. Chair.

It's funny that we're standing here speaking to the levy, and some of the Members opposite have actually stood up and spoke to it. Some of them actually have – they've been quite positive in the sense that they say, tough choices, we understand. Some have gotten up and haven't even spoken to this particular part. That's the thing that people understand. Where this is what they call a money bill, it allows for the Opposition to stand and not actually speak to the thing that we're speaking – to not even be relevant to the bill we're speaking to.

What I'm going to do is I'm going to speak to the comments made by Members opposite. I have the notice, and I'm going to give the Member opposite, the Member for Mount Pearl North credit, because do you know what, he gave a speech earlier and he knew there was a crowd up there. He knew there was a crowd up in the stands here watching. I was really impressed. If Oscar season wasn't gone, he would have been nominated. As the Member behind for CBS likes to talk about, it was a performance worthy of the Trinity Pageant.

He was speaking about Bill 35. Bill 35, which actually went through second reading in Committee in this House earlier today, and there was no recorded vote. Now, you'll notice, Mr. Chair, that when Members opposite want to record their actual position on a bill, they'll call division. That's an opportunity for them to stand up and vote against something or vote for something, but stand up and be recorded.

It's funny, that in Bill 35, which the Member – when the crowd was here in the gallery and he spoke so eloquently against, he wasn't so against it that he felt it was necessary to call division. There was no recorded vote. In many cases, do you know what? There's no actual idea as to how it's voted. In fact, it pretty much appears unanimous. It's funny, just to go to show that what actually happens in this House sometimes might be just a bit of a performance.

Again, the Member spoke and he said, well, we only got this bill Thursday, and just talking about this process. What I have to remind people is this process is the exact same one – in fact,

it's much better than the process we received when we were in Opposition.

MR. JOYCE: How many showed up for the briefing?

MR. A. PARSONS: I don't know how many showed up for the briefing. Nobody.

AN HON. MEMBER: Nobody!

MR. A. PARSONS: Nobody showed up for the briefing.

I'd be interested to know which MHA showed up, but I guess what I'm speaking about is the process that when we were in Opposition there were many cases where we were threatened.

AN HON. MEMBER: What?

MR. A. PARSONS: Honest to God – not by anybody opposite, but they were a part of the government that condoned that behaviour, that you're not going to speak about this until the day of and that's it. That's all there is to it.

In this case, they had the bill on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and today we're speaking to it. We've gone through these stages. This process is the same one that they sat with and had no problem with when they were in government. So we have to talk about that. It's one thing to stand up and complain about a process without saying that when they were on the other side here, they didn't say a word about it. They didn't say a word.

The same Member opposite, I like the fact that he speaks about these Standing Orders. We are going to fix the Standing Orders. It's one thing to complain about it, but when you complain about something and you had 12 years to fix it and did nothing, well one has to ask, what were you doing? What were you doing if you were there for 12 years and never had a problem, but now all of a sudden it ain't good enough.

If you're going to speak about a process, you have to remember the context of, this was a former government, 12 years here. There is a lot of stuff they talked about that they were going to fix and didn't do. They want to talk about the promises and stuff – I can remember as a former

Cabinet minister from that side who said, well, they're not promises. They were planks in the campaign format. They weren't promises, they were planks. We can't forget the history because it's not actually ancient history.

I have to correct the Member opposite, the Member for Cape St. Francis. I have no issue with most of what he's had to say tonight. He talked about the 24-hour notice. Again, we'll get past the fact that when he was in government they never gave any notice, none – none.

The fact is I stood in this House and said yeah, we'll give notice. We actually gave Members of the Opposition over 30 hours' notice – 30 hours' notice. It's funny because they have no problem standing in this House or tweeting out we're debating this, come on up. As soon as they find out – boom, we're going to debate this tonight, come on up. That's cool. That's excellent. That's what we're supposed to do.

When we told them at 10:34 a.m. on a Monday that the budget vote is the next day later on, they couldn't find Twitter, which is amazing for the Member for Mount Pearl North. It is amazing that the Member for Mount Pearl North, who is actually the Deputy Opposition House Leader, couldn't find his Twitter, couldn't put it out. That's amazing.

I'll say to the Member for St. John's Centre I never heckled you or said a word when you were speaking, but apparently the courtesy doesn't go the other way. If you want to talk about broken promises, I remember four years ago you were the no-heckling party, no heckling whatsoever. Mr. Chair, she continues, can't stop. She's going to get umpteen opportunities to stand in this House and speak and I'm not going to stay a word, but the minute I say something, heckling, heckling, heckling. Oh my God, God forbid.

We have to talk about this that –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Chair, it's amazing, she can't help herself. She's still over there heckling. Maybe it's the hour of the day. Maybe I'll provide the same level of courtesy that I'm being shown right now. I will say this: It's out of character for the Member for St. John's Centre

to continue heckling while a Member opposite is speaking.

Mr. Chair, I'm going to continue on because this thing about the notice, the fact is that the Members opposite knew it, but they didn't put it out there to the public. That reminds me of September because that's when they knew full well the financial state of this province and they wouldn't say anything then either. They wouldn't say a word.

It's amazing because they were asked, didn't put it out, didn't say a word. I can see why because when we came in and we took over and we said we know it's bad. We know that the crowd opposite has been on a scorched-earth policy. We know that it was worse than what we thought it was, but nobody realized how bad it was.

The people that had that actual information and could have released it, didn't. Now again, I do not pin that on the Member for Cape St. Francis because he wouldn't have had access to that. He wasn't minister of Finance and he wasn't the premier at the time. But the current Leader of the Official Opposition, he had the information. He had the information and he withheld it. Wouldn't put it out there, held back on the information.

He talks about getting the information out there, but back then didn't say a word, wouldn't put anything out there. Again, Mr. Chair, I'm going to speak more about some of the comments by the Leader of the Official Opposition. He spoke earlier today and I'm going to save that because I'm going to need a bit more time to talk about some of the stuff he said and the actions, or, in his case, the amount of inaction that his government took when we talk about something like Muskrat Falls – the amount of inaction. Well, the only thing that there was action on was the cheerleading. That's for sure.

Anyways, Mr. Chair, I'm happy to continue to speak to this, but I look forward to the comments from the Members on the other side.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is indeed an honour to stand again tonight and talk for a few minutes around the levy bill itself and the impact it is going to have on people. I just got an email – so there are obviously people watching at this hour in the night – regarding the levy and they asked me a question. What they said was: Mr. Brazil, if you get a chance to speak again, can you bring this to the attention of the House and ask how this is fair? He makes \$63,000 a year. Both of his neighbours live next to him; one makes \$44,000 and one makes \$48,000, they don't pay the levy. And he understands why and they shouldn't, according to his email, and rightfully so. His wife stays at home to take care of the children, yet he'll have to pay that levy. He is asking how is that fair.

It is a legitimate question. There is more of an income in a family – not that those people should be burdened with the levy obviously. We are not supporting that. But it puts people who are just above the threshold in an area where other people have a bigger income in their household are being penalized because they're doing their home care, or the affordability is with their home care to be home and one of parents to take care of. So I said I put it out there and hopefully I'll get an answer later on as to what it was based on and how the formula works.

I've also been getting – which is baffling, in a good sense. I received this astonishing email about an hour ago, and obviously I'm assuming it was sent to me for me to read it out and get my head around it. So while I'm reading it and getting my head around it, I'll share it with everybody here. It's addressed to the Minister of Education:

We are writing today on behalf of the members of the Child Care Coalition of Newfoundland and Labrador with our official response to *Budget 2016*. We were contacted by department officials on April 15, the day after the budget. They were contacting us as a courtesy to outline the specific changes in Early Childhood Development budget for 2016. During this conversation, we were informed that a total of

\$7.4 million had been cut from the \$45.7 million budget that was budgeted in 2015 – a total of 16 per cent cut.

The new funding numbers I was given was a total of \$38,300,000 for 2016. As part of that conversation, we asked for a copy of all the changes made to the budget. Since that time, we have followed up on this request both by phone and via email. As of this date, we have still not received any budget outlines from the department. As a result, we have filed an access to information request for this information.

Earlier this year, we requested from the department information regarding funding for programs under Early Childhood Development division. We were unable to obtain the information from the department and had to file an ATIPP request for those documents as well.

During our conversation prior to the election last fall, we were promised a more open and transparent government and greater access to information. In the spirit of this commitment, we ask that moving forward that we are able to obtain reasonable information requests in a timely manner, without the need for an official information request.

During our post-budget consultations, it was explained that the budget reduction reflects the line-by-line department analysis, as well as the elimination of the workshop training program and the transportation subsidy program. We were assured that they were no changes to funding for any of the core programs, including the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement, the Operating Grant Program or the parent subsidy program.

While we were very pleased to not see any cuts to core program funding, we are still very concerned about the overall funding arrangement for Early Childhood Development. The \$45.7 million that was previously allocated for the child care and early learning was a direct result of three decades of advocacy and determination to do better for our children.

While we certainly understand the fiscal situation that the province is facing right now, it is very disappointing to see such a large reduction in funding in this budget that will have

a detrimental effect on child care moving forward.

One of the program cuts was the workplace training program. This particular program was underutilized and, as such, was a victim of the cuts. This program that was designed during the previous administration was not well planned or delivered and, as such, participation in the program was low. While we recognize that the program was not working, we also recognize that there is a strong need for the development of a revamped workplace training program for early childhood educators.

We hope that as part of your new zero-based budget approach that has been promised for the future, in addition to a new federal funding framework, that you will consult with the educators and operators to develop a new workplace training program that will better meet the needs of our industry.

The other major program that was cut in this budget was the transportation subsidy. As part of our budget consultations, we were told that only a very small number of children would be affected, as many of them would be covered by other programs through other departments. We questioned these statements as there is a separate budget for transportation subsidies that are covered by AES and Child, Youth and Family Services.

We have already been hearing from a number of concerned parents and owners who are worried about child care being forced out of the system as a result of these decisions. We feel that this was a valuable program to invest in and that the decision to end the program is short sighted.

Full-day kindergarten has become a very contentious issue in this budget. The coalition originally supported the idea when we were consulted by the previous administration and we still believe that the program will provide many benefits for our children.

Based on our financial situation and other cuts made to Education and Early Childhood Development, we have decided to take another look at full-day kindergarten. While we still support the idea, we think that some changes need to be initiated for implementation of the

program for it to be beneficial. We think it would be wise to phase in the program instead of implementing it in all schools at once. Ontario announced a full five years to phase in their program. We feel that it might be best to reconsider the implementation schedule to ensure that the schools and educators are ready for the transition.

Another major issue that needs to be addressed, in relationship to full-day kindergarten, is the situation regarding supplements for Level 3 school-age support staff. When full-day kindergarten starts, these staff members that are working with school-age children will no longer be eligible for their supplement. Our major concern is that many of these staff members will be forced out of the field.

We recognize the need to maintain quality training for staff that are caring for our children, but as we have outlined to the department several times, there are some options available to address this problem. We recommend the development of a bridge program that would include a combination of online courses and workplace training in order for these staff to become, at minimum, Level 1 early childhood educators and to be eligible for supplement support.

We were disappointed not to see any changes in this budget to the Operating Grant Program. The more we have researched the program through ATIPP documents and through reaching out to the stakeholders it has become clear that this program is not working. By the department's own admission the program will not work for everyone.

We believe that we should be investing in programs that would be beneficial to all child care stakeholders and not just a few selected parents and operators. If funding is not available to implement the universal Operating Grant Program that will meet the needs of all the centres, the program should be eliminated altogether. The money currently budgeted for the operations grant would be much better served by providing greater access to the subsidy program or developing new programs that would address the real issues in child care.

We urge the department to reconsider the planned review for the program and instead eliminate the program altogether in lieu of funding programs that will work for our children and our industry. One last issue that has come to our attention concerns inclusion. In some cases, special needs children will now have to share an inclusion support worker instead of the usual one-on-one support.

In one specific case, which one of our own members have raised with the department already, two special needs children in that centre will now have to share a support worker. Both of these children require constant assistance, including bathroom use. The major concern is that one child will have to be left in a ratio without a support worker several times a day. We feel this is unacceptable and possibly direct safety issues.

We were involved in the inclusion strategy discussions and, at the time, we recognized there are situations where a shared support worker would suffice, if the needs of the children in their care were not severe. We were told that in cases where the needs were severe, exceptions would be made to allow for one-on-one support. We urge you to reconsider these policy changes to allow greater one-on-one support for special needs children that need it.

We hope that you will consider these concerns as you and the department work towards a zero-based budget approach for the future. We would recommend that you continue to work with our organization and other representing child care stakeholders in order to develop real, evidence-based policy decisions that are not only developed by bureaucrats who do not understand the industry and the needs of our parents and children.

We look forward to working with you to build a better future for our children and industry.

Regards, Child Care Coalition of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Chair, that outlines a multitude of things around early education, early childhood development and, particularly, our education system. These are people who come with their own invested interest to improve the lifestyle of

children in our school system and give them a better opportunity to be successful.

Obviously, the concerns here from this not-for-profit organization is all about lack of inclusion, lack of consultation as part of the whole process, lack of the minister even responding, lack of the bureaucrats in that department through the direction of the minister even sharing the information that they asked and having to put them through the ATIPP program. An organization they should be working with on a daily basis to improve people's lives.

It's shameful that an organization like that who asks simple questions about programs and services, without even being critical at the time, are asking simple questions and want simple information so they would know how to better adjust their programs and services.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will have a chance to speak again on this budget.

CHAIR: Order, please!

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

MR. HOLLOWAY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Let's see, we're into the wee hours and I can tell you it's 2:14 a.m. We're into the filibuster on the levy. When Bill 29 was being debated, of course I was looking at it from the outside, not being a Member of this hon. House, and I always wondered: How would people go about doing this? How could they manage to go for so many hours?

I can tell you now, Mr. Chair, I have been up 22 hours and able to stand on my feet and proud to do so here in the wee hours of the morning and talk about the levy.

The big issue that I find around the language of the levy is that it's really a surtax. I know that people have been upset and they've commented – we get accused by Members opposite of not listening to our constituents, afraid to go to the district, that we really have not paid attention to what people have told us. Any time that I've responded to questions in the district about the levy, I've said, you know what, it's really a

surtax. Of course, we had a surtax. In 2007, when people filed their income tax return, there was a 3 per cent surtax. So it's not something we weren't accustomed to.

I appreciate, though, and I say this with all sincerity, I understand the difficulty that paying more tax has on people. Now, I'm pleased that because of our partnership and our friends in Ottawa, and our partnership with our colleagues in the federal government, that we've been able to mitigate some of that. When we're accused of not listening to our constituents and the people of this province, one of the things that people said was that we should not have put a ceiling on it. There should not have been a cap of \$900, no matter how much money you made, and we probably should move it up the scale a bit. Well, our first opportunity – because the levy itself was meant to be a temporary thing. We said as soon as we were able to do it, we would. And the proof is in it.

I know people are saying they find it difficult to believe some of the things we've said, but I would think that what we've done about the levy thus far is a testament to our commitment to really helping the people in this province.

I'll also say that for myself, and I know my colleagues here on this side of the House – and it's been said earlier today and tonight that – we did not seek to be elected to cause pain and suffering on the people of this province. I did not choose to do that. I have spent my life like my colleagues, and I would even argue Members opposite – we've spent our lives trying to help people, but we've been thrown into this wicked mess that we're into.

Unfortunately, we're at a time in this province where we need some leadership, and this leadership needs to steer us back into prosperity. I think all of us had an email from a gentleman earlier tonight, and I took some time to email him back. His question was: Should he stay or should he go? My comment to him was: I personally and wholeheartedly believe that there is a bright future for this province. We are going through some terrible things right now, but with a solid plan we'll come back into prosperity. I know we can find that.

Despite all the bit of twisting of words and not accurate 100 per cent information that gets said here in this House, some of that information, of course, causes – it's almost like a chain reaction to what happens outside of the House as people are watching. I suspect people are watching here tonight. They're listening to some of the – I wanted to use a different word, but I'll be respectful and say some of the stuff that's been presented here on this floor, rhetoric would probably be the more positive reference to some of the language that's been used.

Some of that has caused people to not fully understand the circumstance, all the impacts of some of the suggestions. We've asked Members opposite for ideas. If we haven't got it all figured out – because all I hear from Members opposite is you shouldn't do this, you should do that, you shouldn't do this. We've said, well, give us some real ideas.

I said that to this person in an email earlier tonight. I said while every idea that comes forward may not be something that we can do, I think it can trigger some ideas that can get us back to sustainability. I encourage – I mean we've asked Members opposite, give us some real ideas. Instead of complaining that we've cut this and we've raised taxes here and there, give us something we can actually use, as we move forward into the fall that it's another idea that can help bring us closer to prosperity.

The whole reason we have to even consider raising taxes, thinking about this surtax and the levy is because of things like Muskrat Falls. I can tell you as I was campaigning in the fall, many people were talking about Muskrat Falls. They were talking about the things that were going wrong with Muskrat Falls.

One of the consistent questions I get asked is: Do we have to do Muskrat Falls? Well, unfortunately we're in a situation where we have no other choice in my mind. We've got upwards of 4,800 people employed in a project all throughout the province into Labrador. They're very high-paying jobs. You take that out of the mix of the labour force and that has an impact on the economy of this province.

We have a contract with Emera. The contract states – and my terms may be a bit loose on this,

but basically it says that if we don't supply the power to Nova Scotia, they can go anywhere and get it and we still have to pay the bill. So while they may get it for a cheap cost out of Muskrat Falls, if they go down the Eastern Seaboard or they go to Hydro-Québec, no matter what they pay, it's our bill to own.

We also have the loan guarantee with the federal government. It's our burden to bear. We have already invested about \$6 billion into the project. So when people say, can we stop Muskrat Falls? I would argue that we can't. We're into this mess all because of a contract that was signed by the previous administration. The burden on us and the people of this province and our kids, it is something to bear. We have no other choice.

We put \$1.3 billion this year into that project. If we never had to do that we would not have probably had to raise the taxes like we've had to do. We inherited a \$2.7 billion deficit.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. HOLLOWAY: It's \$2.7 billion that we've had to come up with. Do you think that any of us have really wanted to cut programs, to raise taxes? That's not what we were interested in. We'd love to be able to invest more into education.

I listened to the Member for – and I want to make sure I get it right – for Conception Bay East – Bell Island. He said it earlier when he talked about Riverside Elementary. Now the Member, I would say to him that what he said was actually not correct. We found out that out of over \$600,000 that was allocated to do the design work, only 1.6 per cent of the work was actually completed before we tabled this budget.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. HOLLOWAY: It's 1.6 per cent, \$10,000 of over a \$600,000 project budget. What it really meant was that they actually did a walk through, did a floor plan, that's it. So saying to the people of Shoal Harbour and Clarendville in my district that the project was tender ready – came to Clarendville on a Saturday to go to a rally and to say to me: Now, I'd be careful about what I say

here publicly because this project in my mind was ready to be tendered.

Well, I found out by asking the current Minister of Transportation and Works, can you tell me how much money has been spent on this project? What percentage of the project was ready? Was the tender ready to go to construction?

I can tell you, and I'd table it and I posted it on social media, that 1.6 per cent of the project was actually done. In my mind that is nowhere near completion. So when the Member opposite gets up and says that project is ready, that is not true. That is not accurate whatsoever.

That comes back to my initial point that there are a lot of things that get said in this House but some of the things are leading people down the wrong road. I beg people's indulgence, do your own homework. Understand where we're coming from. Our hearts are in this. We're trying to make the best plan forward for our province. We know there's some pain right now, but we will –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. HOLLOWAY: Yes, I'd encourage the Member opposite to stand up and tell me something different than what I've said now. Stand up; I'll sit down, absolutely. But, I doubt if he's going to do that.

I encourage people who are watching, people who are constituents in our districts, please –

CHAIR: Order, please!

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

MR. HOLLOWAY: – please take the time to understand all of the facts before you start (inaudible).

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for St. John's Centre.

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

I'm happy once again to stand and to speak to this bill. I was quite astounded by the outpouring of emotion by the Minister of Justice.

Particularly when he began his speaking and he was criticizing folks on this side for not speaking directly to the bill, and never once did he speak directly to the bill. So it was kind of interesting. I do believe the theatrics of the minister were somewhat unwarranted, exaggerating and misrepresenting exactly what was happening in this House. So that's unfortunate.

Now, the other thing, Mr. Chair, is that the minister, once again, referred to the fact that his government, through the Premier and through the minister, had guaranteed the people of the province that they would give the people of the province 24 hours' notice before they would have the budget vote. In fact, what they're saying is they're blaming the Opposition for not giving the people 24 hours' notice for the budget vote.

In fact, what happens is the Minister of Justice, as House Leader, knows that what he does is, as a courtesy, he informs the House Leaders of both Oppositions about the Orders of the Day. He does that early in the morning, and the standard practice is respecting that courtesy. It's not really permissible, it's sort of an agreement that Opposition will not publicize that information. In fact, the Opposition House Leaders did not publicize that information.

The Minister of Justice and the Premier did not, in fact, inform the people of the province and give them 24 hours on the budget vote as they had promised the people. Once again, what we see is a broken promise by this government. A promise they had made only a few days before so very clearly in this House and through the media that that's what they were going to do, and they did not.

So what they wanted to do was to blame the Opposition for not doing it, which is very disingenuous. It surprised me. That level of politicking I found very, very surprising. I didn't expect that from the Minister of Justice. I didn't expect that at all. I thought that was a very, very odd and disingenuous way of dealing with that particular issue. I believe the people of the province see that as well.

The last time I spoke, Mr. Chair, again, what I was doing was reading – I've invited people from the province to send me via email any issue that they would like me to bring to the House, knowing that we had the time to be able to speak to whatever issue people would like us to speak to. Primarily, I asked people if they have any particular issues around the budget that they would like me to bring to the House on their behalf. Again, social media is such a wonderful thing because people at home actually have the opportunity now, through social media, to be able to be part of this filibuster, to be part of this debate in real time.

So I'd like to, as much as my time allows me, to read a few more messages from people across the province. This one is: My concern, Gerry, is for the people who already live in poverty. Now, we haven't had a whole lot of chances to talk about that lately. A lot of the questions in Question Period in the last two weeks were wrapped up around the resignation or dismissal of Mr. Ed Martin, the former CEO of Nalcor, and how that was handled by government, and exactly what was going on. So a lot of our question time in the past few weeks was wrapped up around this.

I'm very happy to be able to read this about, again, how the budget really affects people who are quite vulnerable and living in poverty. So her message says: My concern, Gerry, is for the people who already live in poverty. Food prices will go up as a result of the gas tax – we all know that; that makes sense. I imagine that landlords will also raise rents – we see that happening; that's a reality. AES has no plans to raise Income Support, and I worry about the impact of the cutbacks on necessities such as transportation assistance.

We're seeing that a lot. There are a lot of people in my district who are living below poverty lines. They're relying on Income Support. A lot of them would have medical transportation assistance from AES if they have, for instance, particular mental health needs and can't take public transportation or if they have a certain limitation in their mobility and they can't take public transportation, yet they have to go see their doctors.

I even had a woman who was going to a support group. She was going to a mental health support group and her transportation was cut off. And she wasn't even taking a taxi; she needed a bus card. But the very fact that the levels of Income Support are so low and haven't hardly at all increased in a number of years, yet the price of food has increased, the price of clothing has increased and the price of rent has increased.

So what's happening is that people are getting poorer and poorer because their level of income, whether it be through Income Support, is not increasing. She said: How is this budget in line with the Poverty Reduction Strategy? That's a really interesting question, Mr. Chair. Was there a poverty lens applied to this budget to look at how, in fact, is this budget in line with the Poverty Reduction Strategy?

We still don't have a real clear idea of that. I know that the Minister of Finance had offered me a technical briefing on the budget and on these kinds of issues, and that was about a month ago or even maybe a little bit more than that. It was shortly after the budget came down, so not quite a month ago and I still – yeah, April 14 is when the budget came down, so I still haven't had that technical briefing and I was really looking for to that.

She also goes on to say – another one, this is another question. Her first question is her concern for people living in poverty and how the budget affects people living in poverty and whether it's in line with the overall Poverty Reduction Strategy. Her second question – of course, these aren't questions that I can answer, but I certainly hope that government would take a look at them. She said another one: Given that many folks will be leaving the province, how is this budget reflective of the province's retention strategy? Or maybe they no longer have that.

I don't know because in the budget we haven't seen anything that speaks to a provincial retention strategy. We haven't seen in the budget anything that really speaks concretely about a population growth strategy. So I think that would be an interesting one to hear from the Minister of Finance or from someone on government's side.

How is the budget in line with the Poverty Reduction Strategy and how is this budget reflective of or in line with the province's retention strategy? Or maybe we no longer have that.

Hard job to say, Mr. Chair; those are questions for the government. Those are only questions that the government can answer.

Another one from another citizen: Gerry, thank you for speaking on behalf of your constituents. My question is this: Why can't the book tax be replaced with a few extra cents tax on soda pop? That's her question. People buy far more pop than books. Also, why can't the gas hike be replaced or at least mitigated by a tax on fast food drive-through windows? Isn't that interesting? She'd like to see a tax on drive-through windows instead of the tax on gas. That's kind of an interesting idea.

By doing these two things, the Liberal government would show they have the health and well-being of the Newfoundland and Labrador citizens as a top priority. Not only that, but the Liberal government would set an example for all provincial governments for an innovative and progressive policy instead of the regressive, backward and shameful policies they are currently implementing. I have yet to hear one single valid reason why this can't be done. Thank you for continuing to be accessible on social media.

Those are kind of interesting ideas, Mr. Chair. I would love to hear from government in terms of what they think about these. These are her ideas. The gas hike, why not replace some of that with a tax on drive-through fast food? Also, instead of putting a tax on books, why not put a few extra cents tax on pop? Those are interesting ideas. Maybe the Minister of Finance will be able to address some of these questions that people have been raising. These folks wanted this brought to the floor of the House.

CHAIR: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member that her speaking time has expired.

MS. ROGERS: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I look forward to getting up and speaking again.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

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

It's indeed a privilege to get up here again now tonight and talk again on Bill 14, the levy. For anyone watching at home, this is a budget and we can speak –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. K. PARSONS: The crowd in Flatrock are definitely up; I'm telling you right now. I just put out a tweet and they're all up in Flatrock watching this tonight, guaranteed. All the boys are in the shed tonight watching. They just finished watching the hockey game and now they're watching.

We have a chance to get up and we speak about the budget and whatnot. We've heard over the last little while that Members opposite always talk about wasting money and how we squandered \$25 million –

AN HON. MEMBER: Twenty-five billion dollars.

MR. K. PARSONS: Twenty-five billion dollars, I'm sorry. Tonight I heard it was up to \$29 billion.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. K. PARSONS: Thank you very much.

There's after being a lot of good investments done in the province in the last number of years. I'm going to talk about my district because I work closely with the municipalities in the area. There are still issues down there.

I've been lobbying the Minister of Municipal Affairs for a couple of areas in my district. We

have a huge problem in the Town of Pouch Cove with water. I have to say, he's been very receptive. He's understood – I even showed him a video one day. I spoke to the Mayor of Pouch Cove and he told me he was speaking to the minister and the minister understood the concerns of the Town of Pouch Cove. So I really appreciate that because he does.

There are lots of needs in this province. Infrastructure spending is not a bad thing. Over the last number of years, the whole area has benefited from money that government invested. I'm going to give you a couple of examples in my district. I'm just going to talk about my own district.

The Jack Byrne Arena, named after a great man – named after a very good man.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: I know most of the Members over there are shaking their heads, yes. He was a very good friend of mine, by the way. I helped him out. He was a good guy. It's great to see the Jack Byrne Arena is named the way it is. He put a lot of time and effort into it. We were for years and years trying to get an arena. There are great hockey teams down our way. The Flatrock Flyers were four-time Herder champs, which I am a four-time Herder champ, Mr. Chair. Hockey was a big thing down there.

Just to give you an example now of an investment, you wouldn't believe an investment of a hockey arena. I think any time we make these investments, it's a great investment. In 2005, when I was on the executive for minor hockey down there, we had 167 children involved in minor hockey in the whole area. We built the new arena and opened it in 2008. Last year, there were over 800 children involved in the minor hockey system.

I consider that a great investment. It doesn't necessarily have to be a hockey arena. I'm sure there are arenas in your district and there are arenas in all the districts – soccer fields, softball fields. Anything we can go to invest to see our youth take advantage of this stuff.

Minor hockey is a great sport. I coached every year in minor hockey. I played a good few years

in minor hockey. We used to be up to St. Bon's. I can remember – everyone must know how small St. Bon's is. They used to put the stick across and we'd have two groups, one on each side. So it will tell you how small it was back then.

It's great to see facilities like that. This arena that was built down there is making money every year. It's doing well. This year I went to their meeting and they showed us the nice surplus of money they're making. So it's a good investment that we made.

I look at education in my district, and I have to say I'm very pleased – we're one of the fastest growing areas in the province by far when it comes to children going to school. The school at Cape St. Francis, which is down in Pouch Cove – which used to be called Shoe Cove – that was built in the '90s, and it was built for a declining population. That's what they said at the time; it was built for a declining population. The classroom sizes, they're small classrooms and there is about 20 or 21 children that used to be in a classroom, but now they're absolutely blocked right to as far as you can get. There are two new modular classrooms after getting built on there. So it will just tell you how that's after growing.

It's a beautiful, little school. The teachers down there are fantastic. The school council down there are fantastic. The parents, the support that they get in the school, it's unbelievable. Even from support like the Lion's Club and stuff like that, it's a really lovely, little school.

In another part of my district, in Logy Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cove, there is St. Francis of Assisi. That too is a smaller school. I'd say there are about 260 children in the school, but it's just getting a new expansion built on now. Talking to the teachers down there, they're very pleased with the quality and what they have for supplies. The school itself, over the last number of years, there was over a million dollars in renovations done. Now, this school back in the '90s was looked at whether they were going to be able to keep it open or not. Right now, the population has grown that much in the area that it's a nice, viable, little school. Government invested over a million dollars in putting new windows, siding and the roof on it. They paved the parking lot

down. It's a beautiful, little school, and that's a nice school.

In another part of my district, in Torbay there's a new school getting built. It's a great investment because of the enrolment. The population in Torbay has grown by almost 30 per cent in the last 10 years. A lot of people moving to the Northeast Avalon, it's a great place to live. You're five or ten minutes away from Stavanger Drive. The Jack Byrne Arena attracts people. The new Torbay Bypass Road attracts people. So you have access to get to it.

You see the number of new families and it's amazing, because one time you knew all the names in Torbay: the Codners, the Tappers, the McGraths, the Roaches and everything else. But a lot of different names down there – the Mannings, I better remember my friend (inaudible). That has all changed because right now there are new people from all over the province after moving in.

Right now this year when the school opens in September, I think we're looking almost at enrolment of 900 children in Holy Trinity Elementary. So it has really after growing in the last number of years. This new school is going to be fantastic. What it's going to do is Holy Trinity Elementary will go K to 4 and Cape St. Francis will go K to 4, and this new school will take the five, sixes and sevens.

We were hoping that it would open in September. The school board came out and notified the parents – which was a great job that they did. They notified the parents and told them that it doesn't look like the school is going to open in September. More than likely it probably will be in January. They set up a plan so that parents were aware. They let them know that we'll probably move the grade fives and sixes into the new school in January, if we're ready, but the grade sevens are going to stay at the high school.

This new school, what it's going to do is take the pressure off the high school and, like I said, take the pressure of the other two schools. These are investments that we've done in my district that I'm very, very proud of. Education is a huge role and we need to do what we can for education.

I don't think any of that money was squandered. I'm going to get up later up and I'm going to mention about each one of my towns, but I want to mention the value of the Torbay Bypass Road. I know you're familiar with Torbay area; you have relatives down in that area, Mr. Chair. I tell you, every morning you can hear on VOXM or CBC about the delay on Piperstock Hill. Every winter you would hear it, guaranteed you'd hear it.

We had something like 17,000 cars travel along Torbay Road in the mornings, coming up out of Torbay, Flatrock, Pouch Cove, Bauline. Every day you'd hear people delayed, late going to work. This government made an investment. Now, it started back in the '90s the talk of the Torbay Bypass Road was there, but the funding never came through until about 2005. It took three years to build it and now we have a beautiful road there. It is one of the reasons why so many people are wanting to move to the area because you know it's accessible. They can get down to Indian Meal Line from anywhere in St. John's in five or six minutes and they are there.

It opened up the whole area. What it's done for the Town of Bauline and Pouch Cove and Flatrock, which are smaller towns in the area, it really showed a lot of growth in those areas too. People were saying oh, listen, I'm only 10 minutes from Stavanger and I'm out of Pouch Cove and I'm up, or 10 minutes and I'm out of Flatrock and up.

Those were great investments. Now, that road didn't come cheap. That road was a pretty expensive road. First when it was talked about in the '90s they talked about something like \$5 million. By the time that it was built, I think it was over \$20 million. We know that times changed. There were a lot of different things that changed. They put a set of lights in on the Bauline Line and a set of lights on Indian Meal Line, but great investments. Not money that was squandered.

I tell you, there are a few more things I'm going to talk about when I get up later on. I want to talk about the towns, investments we made in communities in my district. I like talking about my district because I live in a beautiful district.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's a pleasure to stand and speak to Bill 14 again, this being the levy bill. Mr. Chair, I have a few emails. I know a number of other Members have talked about the fact that we've received a lot of emails. I've certainly received a ton of them for sure. I received a bunch tonight. The ones I have here now are ones that I've received tonight because people are watching this. They are.

I've been getting messages from people even 10 minutes ago. People said I'm up watching the debate. It's great to see that people are engaged in what's going on. That's all good. This is what some people asked for me to bring up or put on the record.

The first one I have here is: Can you ask a short question. This is from a gentleman. He says, can you ask a short question. What is the plan for front-line staff in long-term care homes, he wants to know. Nurses, LPNs, personal care attendants, there's not enough of us and it's tough, rough, long 12-hour shifts, but lots of management under the direction of – a certain individual. I'm not going to name the name. Now, you don't have to use her name. Okay, good, I didn't. Lots of overtime and too much being mandated to stay or come in on our day of work.

This person is talking about long-term care homes, the fact that they don't have enough staff. They're calling in people on overtime, forcing people to stay when their shift is up because they don't have enough people. That's a concern that particular individual had. I guess that would be addressed to the Minister of Health.

I have another one here. This one here relates to the last time I spoke about the levy and about people in my district who some Members are saying they're rich. Again, I would say they're not rich, they're professional people. They might be nurses, teachers, RNC officers or whatever.

This particular person says: Thank you for standing up for us over-taxed middle-class

working professionals. I do not live in your district, but myself and my husband will pay \$1,400 for the levy tax. We have never collected an EI cheque, have never gotten a GST or Home Heating Rebate and paid for both kids' post-secondary ourselves. We have not contributed to this debt but are expected to pay the majority of it. We work nights, weekends and all holidays and are continuously punished for working hard and having a decent income. Thank you again for bringing up such points in the House of Assembly.

This person is an RN. I didn't write this. This is an email I got from someone not even in my district.

This person here is in my district. This person said: Considering the budget and all that it means, and the timing around when things kick in, I predict a tough Christmas this year for a lot of families in Newfoundland and Labrador and expect that it will creep up on people who don't crunch numbers and budget accordingly, or who are already stretched too thin. The extra gas tax has kicked in, plus extra HST to come, and an added 15 per cent tax on insurance that wasn't there before. Extra fees on all sorts of government services, extra income tax, a levy, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

Things are going to add up in extra tens of dollars here and dozens of dollars there. Soon families will wonder why they're short \$100 here or \$1,000 there. Then, by the time October, November and December roll around, people are going to realize there isn't enough to go around. I expect organizations to help those in need during the holidays will be feeling a heavier burden to provide supports this year. It's another example where community organizations will be expected to pick up the slack.

I know it's an odd thought for June, considering the bigger picture of what the budget means, but it's what comes to mind when I think of the realities to families of these decisions and how it will play out. It's the stressed parents and amazing kids with kid-sized wishes and beliefs that I think of when I think of the strain this budget will have on families. So much else stands out as missteps in this process, but it's the faces of these people and their challenges that play in my head the most. From families who

are just getting by to our students, to our sick and elderly, this budget is going to hit the most vulnerable the hardest.

The final one I have for now, and this is a person in my district.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. LANE: Mr. Chair, it's interesting that Members find this funny. It's amazing to me. It's amazing. This is not me saying this. This is constituents. This is people here in Newfoundland and Labrador. Some of them are my constituents and some aren't. Other Members are saying the same thing. I don't understand why it's so funny. I don't get it.

AN HON. MEMBER: Stop playing politics.

MR. LANE: Someone is saying playing politics. I would have to ask, Mr. Chair, how are we playing politics if a constituent, if a person sends you an email and says, could you please read this in the House of Assembly, and you read it in the House, how is that playing politics? I don't understand it.

School councils are made up of passionate, motivated and knowledgeable school council reps. These people are in our schools and on the ground supporting our students and teachers. We are desperate to stop the negative impact this budget has on our students and teachers. The most vulnerable have the most at stake, class sizes, multi-grading, team teaching and a lack of planning and resourcing for inclusive classrooms is just the tip of the iceberg. We all fully support full-day kindergarten but not to the detriment of the rest of the students.

We also can't continue to expect our teachers to be all things to every student without the resources they need. They're expected to be a teacher to all needs, abilities and exceptionalities, nurse, mental health provider, advocate, babysitter, monitor, traffic cop, et cetera and each negative decision adds to the list. We need to give our teachers our support. There will be a straw that breaks the system.

Government needs to understand the impacts may not be obvious today or in the foreseeable future to every individual family, but we have a collective responsibility. It's about our future. It takes a village to raise a child and Newfoundlanders and Labradorians need to rally behind our kids and show them we are rooting for them and support their success.

Difficult decisions are needed but not those that will mean our K to 12 students receive a subpar education or worse, slip through the cracks that I fear difficult decisions are needed but not those that will mean our students receive a subpar education or worse, slip through the cracks that I fear – okay, I said it twice. It was written there twice. I repeated the line. The line was actually there twice. I guess it must have been a typo.

Please listen to parents, listen to teachers, listen to students, don't just hear but really listen.

Those are four emails I received in the last little while, in the last hour or two. These are emails we're receiving from people in our districts, people in other districts and so on. I'm not alone. I know other Members are getting them as well. I've heard other ones read. I have no problem putting them out there if anyone wants to see them, if you think it was something we made up or something. If that's the thought, I got no problem sharing them but I can guarantee you these are real emails we're getting from people.

People have concerns. I'll say again, everybody understands that we're in a tough financial situation but it doesn't mean that people don't have concerns and it doesn't mean that all the decisions that were made were the best decisions. It doesn't mean that. It doesn't mean that people intentionally made bad decisions. I'm not saying that. Nobody is saying that, but people have these concerns. They feel as if their concerns are not being heard.

That is the thing. They feel like nobody is listening. A number of people have said to me they are hearing, but they're not listening. There is a difference between hearing and listening. That doesn't mean you have to change everything, but there are certain things, adjustments that could be made that would make this more palatable for everybody. That's all people are suggesting is that you take a sober

second look, you make some changes, come back, admit that everything wasn't as perfect as you thought and make those changes. I think that people would be more accepting of it.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

MR. BYRNE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to say thank you to the hon. Member for the interesting mosaic of emails that he was able to offer. It provides an interesting narrative about the whole picture, some of the perspectives that the hon. Member has. He has waxed eloquently about how in his particular district he represents somewhat the upper middleclass. He is very passionate about speaking about the issues of the upper middleclass.

The context of the emails that he provided to the House talked a little bit about how a perspective that was offered by a public servant – who's obviously enjoyed a salary that was somewhat higher than what maybe others might be able to receive. He said that individual should be and the perspective was that because they are high-income earners and they worked hard, they should be exempt from much of the measures – which is an interesting perspective. We certainly appreciate that.

Then he offered a perspective of middleclass, which of course because they are middleclass then they should be exempt. Then he offered a perspective from those who are having a little more difficulty being able to make ends meet and they should be exempt from some of these taxation measures.

I guess it really, Mr. Chair, provides the unique perspective as to who exactly will be able to contribute to some of the solutions because that's one of the things I think the hon. Member failed to do, was to be able to provide any kind of example of how the problem should be solved. He provided a lot of examples about who should be exempt from bearing any sort of requirement to be able to participate in the solution.

But constantly, every time there's any kind of discussion about this, you constantly hear this expression: We know there's a serious fiscal crisis that the province is gripped in. We know that there is a crisis that has to be dealt with. But every time we hear from the hon. Members opposite, they're making the case as to why nobody really should have to do anything about that, especially the government, why the government should just be status quo, no action whatsoever, no increases in revenue, no increases in taxation, no program cuts whatsoever and, really, silence when it comes to the issue about increasing the debt portfolio of the province.

At some point in time, Mr. Chair, we're going to have to deal with exactly what is the appropriate mix for the solution, who exactly is supposed to be exempt, who exactly is supposed to bear the cost.

I heard one Member from the Opposition sort of say tax the rich. And, of course, there was an eloquent discourse on just the fact that, relatively speaking, there are few who would be able to meet that test of – I think there's about 6,000 people in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador who make over \$200,000, most of whom, or a good percentage, are medical physicians, our doctors. So, of course, we always want to be able to attract and retain medical professionals, especially our doctors, especially our specialists, so that element of the discussion has to be brought to bear before any rash decisions are taken.

With that said, Mr. Chairman, what I have not heard at all tonight is actually what specific – everyone agrees there's a crisis afoot, that this is a crisis that goes beyond any understanding or any example or precedent that the province has faced probably until before Confederation itself. One of the things that we hear repeatedly is that the government must take action, but the government is wrong to take action that reduces program expenditures that increases taxes, but also is silent on the issue of increasing the debt.

That's not a solution. So at some point in time, I think we're all going to have to get our collective heads around that. We, on this side, I believe have a solid plan in place. We're developing a program to be able to deal with

that. The last thing we want to do is to provide a circumstance where we just cripple our youth with debt. We've already heard that there are rumors and there are some examples that have been bantered about in the House tonight about professionals, people who are just finishing med school that they are going to be leaving the province.

What if there could be a calculation, a consideration, as to if the debt levels of every man, woman and child in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador were to increase, the public debt were to increase by an additional \$10,000 per head, what would that do to the overall capacity of our province to be able to retain and attract young professionals? I think it would be extremely problematic.

One of the things we know is that to get an education in Newfoundland and Labrador, we have the lowest tuition rates anywhere in Canada. We have one of the most generous student financial assistance programs and it would be very, very helpful if those that sort of bear a benefit from that would participate with us in the solution; but we obviously respect the fact that labour is mobile and labour will be able to go wherever it so desires.

I think biggestcrippler of retaining and attracting people to Newfoundland and Labrador would be if we actually had a provincial debt which went to 60 per cent of GDP. That's exactly where this is going without any action.

Mr. Chairman, we can go on and we can talk a little bit about the fact that it's terrible that the government is cutting a program. I have not yet heard once during this entire debate anyone suggesting, from the Opposition parties, that they would overturn any of these decisions if they were to form a future government. Not once because that's a discussion they don't want to have.

They just want to have a discussion about the fact that they feel it's wrong, but in essence they do not want to actually bury themselves and actually say well, you know something, we're going to have to be accountable. We're going to have to actually be able to be scrutinized as to what our alternative plan would be.

That's one thing you will not hear, I don't think, on the floor of this House this evening, is a credible plan from the Opposition, that in order to solve a \$2.7 billion annual deficit problem, this is how they would solve it. This is the amount of money they would cut in terms of program expenditures, this is the amount of money they would raise in terms of taxes and this is the amount of money they would try and go out to the markets and borrow. The combination of those three elements are what makes a fiscal plan, and, Madam Chair, I don't believe you've heard one word of that from the Opposition as of yet tonight.

They would say that's not their job. They're not the government. It's the government's job to be able to provide those alternatives. Well, Madam Chair, when you get involved in this and you want to say you want to be critical of these kinds of decisions, as a government in waiting, supposedly, you have to actually provide an alternative approach, and it is lost on nobody that they have not offered an alternative approach to anything as of yet. In fact, what they're doing is hiding themselves in the fact that they're being highly critical, which part of their job, but they're not acting as a government in waiting for sure because they'd rather actually sort of just whistle past this.

Madam Chair, the issue here is really a very simple one. They have taken a very deliberate decision. They have taken a decision knowing that the issue should be carried by the next generation. The level of debt that would be required to enact their plan, the do-nothing plan, would result in an overall debt portfolio of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador of \$27 billion.

The do-nothing plan of the Opposition, which is consistent with the 12 years they were in government, which was basically don't attack the debt, don't resolve any of the deficit issues, just continue to pile on and pile on and pile on. Don't actually deal with the structural issues of the fiscal outlook of our province. Just keep on going. Just whistle past the graveyard and then worry about that.

CHAIR (Dempster): Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member his time for speaking has expired.

MR. BYRNE: That's not an acceptable approach, Madam Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. KENT: Thank you, Madam Chair.

There was a plan, and it was a plan we campaigned on. It was a plan we outlined in Budget 2015. We took steps in 2013 and 2014. There are measures that have been taken in this budget that, to some extent, would have had to be considered if we were in government. I'll acknowledge that, but maybe we would have approached them differently. Maybe we would not have gone as far all at once.

One of the things people are really upset about, and rightly so, is the dramatic increase in gas tax. The price of gas went up about 20 cents, 21 cents a litre overnight. So I don't doubt that we would have had to look at raising gas tax but I don't think raising it by 20 cents all at once is a sensible approach. As I shared in an email that I read earlier tonight, the idea of tying it to the price of oil and adjusting gas prices based on the rising price of oil or the fall in the price of oil, that seems to be something that should be considered as well.

Just to respond to the minister for a moment. We did have a plan, and there are measures the Liberals have taken that we would have had to consider to some extent but – take income tax for instance. I acknowledged earlier tonight that we would have had to raise income tax but we wouldn't have instituted the levy. We wouldn't have done it in the manner that this government has chosen to do.

We would have – and the minister and I had a little exchange on Twitter earlier this evening, imagine that.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. KENT: I know it's hard to believe but, yes, I was on Twitter. The minister was pointing

out that I said we would reduce the size of the public service through attrition. Well, yes, that was part of our plan, and we would have had to accelerate that. We would have had to replace fewer positions, given the financial situation that the province now faces. So there was indeed a plan.

There is no doubt that government spending has to be reduced, and it isn't being reduced in this budget. There are lots of things we would have been prepared to do. There are also some things we would have not been prepared to do. Things like the levy, as I mentioned. We would have delayed full-day kindergarten so that some of the cuts that are taking place in the K to 12 systems wouldn't have been required.

We're fully prepared to talk about what we would have done. We're also fully prepared to talk about the investments we've made in the infrastructure and in our communities and in the economy over the last decade that have moved the province forward I would argue. We're happy to talk about any and all of that, at any point in time.

We're also fully prepared to stand here and say that we weren't perfect. We made mistakes. We were in government for over a decade. Yeah, in hindsight, are there certain issues we would have handled slightly differently? Are there things we could have approached in a different way? Hindsight is 20/20. Of course, no government is perfect, but we'll take responsibility for our record. We'll be accountable for the decisions we made.

I know the province today, despite these current economic challenges and despite what this budget is about to do to the province, the province today is in better shape than it was a decade ago. We know that to be true. I think most people if they were to look at it objectively, they'd say the same thing. So we have no problem talking about our record. We have no problem talking about the plan we had to tackle the financial situation.

Again, I feel like a broken record because I've said it so many times over the last month. None of the decisions are easy. I don't envy the position the Cabinet and the caucus find themselves in, but I would argue there was a

better way forward and there was a different set of decisions that could have been made. I know there are lots of people among the Liberal caucus who are uncomfortable with some of the decisions they've made. They're uncomfortable having to defend some of those decisions at this point in time, but that's where we find ourselves.

Madam Chair, I'd like to read into the record some more concerns that have come from people around the province over the last number of weeks. I received a lot tonight. I hope in the days ahead this is not going to be – I don't know how long this debate will go on for – the only budget-related debate we have before the House closes. So there will be more opportunity to share concerns from people as time progresses in the number of days and weeks ahead.

Good morning, I am writing with regard to *Budget 2016*, as I am sure you've come to expect. I sat down with my wife last night and tuned into the live stream of the debate going on in the House of Assembly. This is the first time I've ever done this, by the way, and what I saw floored me more than anything else that has happened in the last couple of months. I could not believe the ignorant and unprofessional attitude the Liberal MHAs maintained throughout the entire debate.

You can hear it in the background tonight, Madam Chair. I can barely hear myself.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. KENT: A bunch of school children are held to a higher standard of manners and decorum than I saw from any MHA sitting in the House last evening. You should all be ashamed of yourselves.

The Opposition Members were presenting petitions on behalf of the people of the province and most of the time you could barely hear them speaking over the Liberal side conversations and constant heckling. These weren't the words of the Opposition Members they were reading; these were the written words of the people of the province – the people that you all work for and repeatedly say you are listening to. How can you say you are listening to the people when you

can't contain yourself long enough in the House of Assembly to listen to the petitions put forward by your constituents? It was utterly shameful and completely ignorant. Shame on you all!

I've also heard it said that the stance of the Liberal government is that the only people demonstrating against this budget are the unions. That could not be more untrue and if you are truly paying attention, you would know this. Yes, the unions are organizing a lot of the demonstrations; however, a lot of those in attendance at these rallies are not union employees.

I, for one, am part of no union and have never actively taken part in a demonstration before now. However, with the release of the proposed budget and the completely negative effect it will have on every lower and middle-class family in the province, I, like many others, have felt it's now or never.

My family is a middle-class family. Both myself and my wife work full-time in what would be considered well-paying jobs, but like most younger, middle-class families in this province we have to count our pennies each month to ensure we don't accrue too much debt and are responsible financially.

I have already taken a 7½ per cent pay cut this past March, as the company I work for cut salaries. We have one small child, two years old, and one due in December. I work in Holyrood and my wife works downtown. Two cars is not an option for us; it's a necessity to get to work each day. Daycare for one child is \$900 per month, so we are looking at \$1,800 a month starting in 2017 for daycare alone.

You've done nothing in this budget to address the ever-increasing cost of child care and I highly doubt you ever will. We have looked at downsizing our house and other options; however, we are tied into a five-year mortgage, started in 2014, and would lose more in penalties if we sell than we could possibly hope to make off our house.

With the market drop since we've purchased, we probably won't be able to sell for as much as we currently owe so we are stuck – stuck in our

house and stuck in this province, that is until this budget kicks in and we have to choose between either eating or making the mortgage payment. Eventually, I guess, the bank will foreclose on us and we'll be downsizing to a nice apartment anyways – problem fixed, right?

None of you are listening to your constituents; this is clear. If you were, then you would be listening to the thousands of stories just like mine and you would realize what you are doing is wrong on so many levels. It's just wrong. I realize also that asking you to vote no on this budget is just a waste of time. You're not going to vote no confidence in your own government and put yourselves out of work. Because trust me, if there was an election held now, very few of you would get re-elected.

But I ask you to make changes that need to be made while you still have time to help the people of this province stay here and survive. Do what you know the people are asking for before it's too late. Stand up for your constituents when they need you most.

Those sentiments, unfortunately, are not unlike many sentiments I've received from all kinds of young, working families in the province. There are legitimate concerns being brought forward and, in some cases, as we'll hear as the debate continues, there are people proposing alternatives and people proposing solutions.

I had a chance to talk for a few minutes about some of the things we would have done differently. I think there are a lot of people out there who have suggestions for government as well and they need to be heard also.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

To continue where I left off, talking about the effects of the budget, I finished off on families, how it is after striking seniors, students and families. Generally, I can probably go into some detail, just everything else – you mention three core groups. I guess these have been in the media somewhat. You have court closures as has

been highly talked about in Harbour Grace, Wabush, Grand Bank, Grand Falls-Windsor. Twenty-hour snow clearing on our provincial highways, cancelled.

Madam Chair, it is interesting actually on the 24-hour snow clearing. I happened to be reading earlier tonight – the Government House Leader had submitted over the years, lobbied for 24-hour snow clearing out in his district, running from the ferry I am assuming. He presented petitions and had very passionate arguments.

I read it all and I'm not going to belabour the House or the minister with any of this stuff, but the one quote – this is from Hansard, Madam Chair: The Members wonder why I worry about this but those are the Members who get 24-hour snow clearing. When you come out my way, you do not get it; it is an issue. It's a life and death and I appreciate the opportunity to do this today.

That was a petition. I'm not objecting, I don't disagree with a word said there, Madam Chair, but that's one of the things that were cut. We had 24-hour snow clearing and I hear Members opposite will make the comment that well, we never had it. It is almost like we never had it out our way – they never ever had it, so what's the big deal?

During Estimates the Minister of Transportation and Works disclosed to us that – for instance, I'll use the most common road, the closest to this area, the Outer Ring Road. We don't have 24-hour snow clearing, but no one will be checking the roads. Everyone is off duty. As we know during the winter, a one degree change and we have black ice, stuff comes out of the blue and roads conditions deteriorate rapidly. We have no people checking the roads, the call-in crews. You're at your own device. Unless we have a storm, everything else is drive at your own risk.

Now, areas in the province where they've never had 24-hour snow clearing, they'll say we were always used to that so live with it. I don't agree with any of our roads being unsafe to drive on and driving at your own risk or you're taking your life in your own hands. I will go back to the Government House Leader's comment, he stated it's life and death.

It's probably not life and death everywhere. I wouldn't argue if it is or is not out there – I've been out there before obviously. But if you have your ferry in Port aux Basques that unloads, you got people who are not familiar with our roads, hitting the road, a tourist or what have you, or new people to the province, that can be a serious issue because driving on our roads is not like driving on other roads.

In saying that, we cut that from the budget. There's no staff on to check the road conditions of our Outer Ring Road, the Veterans Memorial, Manuels arterial. We stated out in Grand Falls-Windsor, out by the Hugh Twomey Health Centre out there – I'm not exactly sure of all the areas, but it was cut. I guess we'll see what'll happen this winter coming.

One thing when you look at 24-hour snow clearing, we've seen what happened with people who commute back and forth to Long Harbour. That was a publicized event because – now, it had nothing to do with 24-hour snow clearing, but it was when crews changed from winter over to summer. We had a snow fall and it created a lot of unsafe driving conditions. I anticipate you'll hear a lot more of this in the news this coming winter and you look at November or December. Again, it's another aspect of our budget that's going to create a lot of anxiety amongst the residents.

Job reductions – we lost 650 jobs identified. I don't need to remind any Members opposite – I watch the news like everyone, and there are pretty powerful ads out there. They weren't created by us. We know who they are created by. This is not propaganda. They're taking words out of Members opposite, exactly what they said during the election.

One Member's words are crystal clear. I've heard him use it here in this House, there'll be no job cuts. That's the issue a lot of Members opposite have to grapple with when they – you see the news, you watch television like we do. I watch it. I'll be the first to say they're pretty powerful ads. The commentary in there, they're taking verbatim material from tweets and what have you, and those words don't lie. They're stating a fact.

That's a tough line, because we could talk budget here and as we get in through the night we're talking – but I do know, every Member in this House knows, when we were on the campaign trail we were on the opposite side. The government of the day now, the Opposition at the time, the Liberal Party, they were speaking a message the public wanted to hear; whereas the governing party were kind of laying out, we were waiting for a rough few years. There was an attrition plan in place. There was a rough road ahead. All the while, when you went to the door you were saying a message the public wanted to hear and obviously they rewarded you with a majority government.

Today's world, more so than any other time, our electorate is more in tune. They're getting younger, they're getting more engaged. They're not so forgiving when they don't feel like they've been told the truth. As I said, we've all heard it. I flick on the news and these ads are floating across the screen. I remember when those were said. I used to listen to it every day.

All I ever used to say, as a resident of the province I hope they can deliver because I have to live here like everybody else. Forget about being an MHA, forget about your political stripe, we all are residents of the province.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. PETTEN: I certainly hope you're right. I have family who work in the public service so I hope there are no layoffs. I have to purchase stuff every day, hopefully you can maintain your promise of no HST hike and other measures.

To come to the reality, to wake up and realize what's after happening, especially to the people who supported you, it has to be tough. We say it a lot of times, and it's come up in this House more times than we can mention, but that's something Members opposite – you'll have to answer to the electorate whenever it is, and your constituents.

I know some of you get up and say you have a great relationship in your district. I hope you do. More than likely you probably do. I'm not saying any of you don't. I just know that if you can go and explain this and people are happy with it, well, that's good too.

Another issue, Madam Chair, is reductions in Regional Health Authorities, approximately a \$22 million decrease. We don't know the direct impacts. They're unknown right now.

Discontinue winter road maintenance, serve municipalities where contractor services are available. We're into the 24-hour snow clearing. Municipalities, where contract services are available, this can pose a problem for smaller municipalities. There is an increase in cost with that too, Madam Chair.

Diesel products tax has increased by 5 cents a litre, aviation fuel has increased. We have projects deferred – I only have a half minute left.

In my district, Villanova Junior High was supposed to have an extension. That's been deferred indefinitely. Schools up my way – it's a fast-growing town. CBS is one of the fastest growing areas of the province. Schools are maxing out. We have portables in a lot of areas. This extension was of great importance.

Now, I know the mayor has written letters and they're lobbying the government to change their mind, but these are having a huge impact on everyone in the province. Not only in my district, right across the board.

I will speak again.

CHAIR: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member his time for speaking has expired.

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island.

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Again, it's an honour to stand for the next 10 minutes or so to speak to the levy bill, particularly the impact it has on the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador related to the 2016-2017 budget.

I first have to clarify for my hon. friend from the great District of Terra Nova, when he got up and talked about misinformation or unclear information regarding discussions here in the House. He did note Riverside school in Shoal

Harbour. I have to clarify. He's right, I was out to a protest. Out of respect, I did try to give him some advice because I didn't want him to be embarrassed in a protest out there where he may say the wrong thing. I wanted to let him know, in case he wasn't aware, about what went on with the school district out there and what we had put in play to do that. I thought I was doing the right thing but, obviously, that wasn't appreciated. That's fine. He can take it that way.

I do have to clarify, just for the listeners, so everybody's clear about where things are. He's probably correct that 1/20th or 1/50th of the work was done, but this isn't about what work was done after I left office and our administration left office. This was about what was committed to and contracted to do. So there's a big difference.

For anybody who would be up at 3:30 in the morning listening to this broadcast right now, the discussion here was about what wasn't done. That's fine. Any minister can get up and tell you well, we didn't get it done, or the bureaucrats didn't do it, or whatever went on. It's part and parcel, but the fact it was committed to, the fact it was contracted out to be done.

Had I still been there and our administration, obviously, you know our track record on schools was to move things forward. We built more schools than any other administration combined previous to ours; 57 projects in the works, 14 brand new schools, major renovations on a number of other ones, 1,900 repairs to schools to ensure people had safe environments, that mould was gone, and that we looked at capacity issues.

That's what the whole thing around Shoal Harbour was, it was around capacity. It was a decision made by us to move that forward. We put a contract out there. Unfortunately, the Member is probably correct, that's all he was told was done, but for some reason in the last seven months somebody didn't move that along, as people didn't move things along in other schools.

Coley's Point, for example, when I became aware it wasn't moving as quick as it should be, and the Member of the day out there was lobbying for it, I went out on site, met with officials, asked what the issue was, why it

wasn't moving, the education officials. It wasn't moving because the land owner and the government at the time could not agree on a price. They were double in difference. It was going on apparently for a year-and-a-half.

It didn't seem it was going to move anywhere, so I said enough of this. We need to move this school forward. It's a necessity. We need to get the kids out of an older school. We need to move it as soon as possible. I did my part, had our legal department expropriate the land, started the process in place for a design thing. Then, obviously, we know what happened then.

There was a writ and a new administration was put in place. I would have hoped that all those things that were already started would have continued. For whatever reason, they were stopped. I just wanted to clarify that to my hon. friend in Terra Nova about what really went on. I do encourage you to keep pushing because it's a necessary expansion to that school, as you know. The module classrooms are peaked out there now and it's not the most conducive learning process for a growing community.

I just wanted to touch on a few other things here that I have related to the levy and the budget itself. Particularly, this caught me off guard at 12:15 a.m. to get an email from somebody. I'll just read this out, a constituent of one of the Members here in the House: As I sit in my hotel room in Ottawa watching the debate take place on the budget it actually turns my stomach. I'm flying into Iqaluit where I'm going to work every day for the next seven weeks, then come home and get married and then have to make that tough decision – as you guys like to say – do I move away? As of right now the answer is yes, more than likely. As a young man, soon to be a newlywed couple trying to start a family, we are a lot better off if we do.

Below is a letter I sent my Member that I am yet to get an answer to. Yet he offered to meet me face to face to discuss, and that couldn't happen on my part because I am now out of the province.

As I sit here and listen to the debate tonight, it makes me sick when the Liberal Members start talking about the past. People are not stupid; we know the mess we are in. Why do you think you

got elected? Even though you did nothing but false promises, false hope, you kept saying we can't leave our kids this debt. Well, my question is: What about my generation? Do you think my parents want to see me or my sister have to move away? The sad thing is our family voted for our Member – me and my fiancée, mom and dad, sister and her boyfriend – because we believed the Liberal government was our hope. Boy, were we wrong.

I'm sending this to every Member and ask the question: What do I do? What do my generation do? I'm 31, my fiancée is 29 and I have busted and worked hard since I was 18 years of age, working to get what I now have. I've never complained about a thing in my life until now. The thought that the last 13 years of travelling here and there for work, doing my best working 10, 12, 14 hours a day to make my life home here in Gambo a possibility is going to be taken away from me because of a very lazy, stupid budget, it is just sickening.

So below paints a pretty good picture of what this budget is doing to us and that in Gambo. I can't imagine how hard it is going to be for young couples like us in the urban areas where the cost of living is significant higher – shameful. So hopefully one of the 40 Members can answer my question and if it involves we don't realize how bad the fiscal situation was, I don't want to hear the blame game and all that. Tell me what your future is here in Newfoundland and Labrador because right now it doesn't look like there's a future here at all.

So I'll try to endeavour to answer that young man's question, and the answer here is there isn't a plan. But I'd say to him don't give up hope, because there's enough people in Newfoundland and Labrador who have already outlined their outrage at this budget and saying this is not the right approach. Does everybody admit there are tough decisions that have to be made and tough decisions that should be made? Are there some things that have been made that make sense? Of course, there are and we've supported those and we fostered them, and we've tried to even alleviate some of the stresses from some of our own constituents by saying these are things that needed to be done but there are a number of things here that are doing damage to young couples like that.

People who are professionals, who want to stay in this province, want to raise families, want to be contributors to our society, want to be volunteers and want to ensure the next generation also has a better lifestyle. They need to know there's some hope. There has to be a plan of what we're going to be doing for the next number of years. Right now, they're disillusioned for a number of reasons.

One, information is not being shared with them. It doesn't seem the government is being forthright. It doesn't seem they're engaging enough people here to make the right decisions. So there is a lot of animosity out there by the electorate. There's a lot of apprehension by younger people who have to make a decision. Are they going to stay? Are they going to leave?

What they are asking is for the Members on all sides to be honest with them. Tell them where we are. Tell them there is still hope in this province. We've been in tough times before and we've always prevailed, but to do that there has to be a plan. There has to be some vision and there has to be some co-operation. That co-operation has to be at every level of government, from municipal governments to your provincial governments to your federal governments. It has to be done in such a way that everybody can see how the continuum moves forward and every part of this province benefits from what we're doing. Even in a restraint time, you can still benefit by how you provide services. It doesn't seem to be a plan to do any of those types of things.

I've been around in restraint budgets. I've been around in major cut budgets and there always seem to be a plan there, even when some areas have to take certain hits or one part of our society had to endure a little bit more. There was always an understanding of where they were and if you hang in there, there was going to be an end result. People were going to be better off, that there was going to be some things going back.

The Liberals here use, continuously, temporary, temporary, but do you know what? Nobody feels that. Nobody feels there's enough of a plan there for this to be temporary. You can't set out dates of where you're going with things, what your

plan is to reach a certain goal. There are no goals set.

It's not around the gas. Is there a certain ceiling? Tell us about the formula. It's not about the price of oil gets to a certain point, is that when you can start reducing levies? It's not about the formula based on who pays in what areas. It's a fly-by-night operation. You've changed midstream on the levy because of backlash from people.

So there seems to be an issue here around people having enough confidence that if it's only temporary, people will stay around. We're resilient enough. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are willing enough to give people an opportunity. They gave you guys an opportunity with an overwhelming majority this past election, but they want some vision here to get things going.

Madam Chair, I'll get a chance to speak again in the next hour or so.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

MR. BYRNE: Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's an interesting pattern that's emerging here. I remember when our government announced that we engaged Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in a Government Renewal Initiative exercise; the Opposition said you don't need to do that. You shouldn't do that. It's irresponsible to do that. It's irresponsible to actually wait and ask people's opinion. You were given the mandate to govern; act and act now. That's what the Opposition said. Don't talk to anyone. Don't seek advice. You were given the mandate to govern this province and so do so unilaterally, without any discussion.

Now to hear the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island stand up and say we didn't consult enough. At what point in time will they sort of reconcile what they said just a couple of months ago with what they are saying now? Because that's the message they are trying to give us.

Madam Chair, it has been difficult because when we were organizing our own platform, trying to analyze and provide a fiscal forecast for the province, based on what we knew, if you look at what was evident, the government of the day in *Budget 2015*, March of 2015, had forecasted a \$900 million deficit. The price of oil didn't change that remarkably to move it to a \$2.7 billion deficit in that same fiscal year.

You can talk and talk and talk and try to explain away that you should have known. Well, we had asked for a fiscal update some time ago. It was never provided by the government. They say that you should have known that of course oil prices had plummeted, so therefore taxation or royalty regimes would have plummeted as well. But of course if you do that, then the former government, the government that was in place when *Budget 2015* was delivered, would have to explain why they only had projected a \$900 million deficit when, in fact, it was a \$2.7 billion deficit.

Madam Chair, it's one of these things that I guess the former government will have to explain themselves. They're taking the position it's not their responsibility any more to explain anything. They talk a little bit about schools. I'd like to talk a little about a project that was almost 10 years in the making that never got anywhere, and that's the Corner Brook hospital.

In 2007, the government of the day announced that a new hospital was required for Corner Brook. It had reached its maximum useable life at the time, life period, and would now have to be replaced. That was 2007. Almost 10 years have passed since. The condition of the hospital has not improved. It has gotten actually into a greater state of disrepair.

One of the things the government did when they announced there would be a new hospital for Corner Brook is they announced there would be a total budget envelope of \$143 million. That was the demise of the project right there and then, because at that point in time every ounce of energy the former government would use to try to advance the project would be to try to actually put the toothpaste back in the tube, because they knew that at \$143 million as a total budget allocation for a brand new hospital for Western Newfoundland, it could not be done.

In fact, what they did is they proceeded over the last 10 years to spend \$25 million in consultants' contracts, and \$25 million in site excavation contracts, never actually doing anything to advance a hospital.

MR. JOYCE: How much?

MR. BYRNE: It's \$50 million, Madam Chair, will be spent trying to advance a hospital for Western Newfoundland, \$25 million of which will be on consulting contracts that at the end of the day, when the government relinquish the reins of their administration on December 1 – well, actually December 14 – there was not so much as a set of documents, a set of tenderable blueprints that the government, our government, could go to the market and actually ask competent companies to be able to put forward a bid on.

We had to do that. We actually had to finish that work. In fact, what the objective was of the government of the day was simply trying to delay, delay, delay, announce a few million dollars in each and every budget hoping to get a little corroboration, a little bit of affirmation by some stakeholders they had in the community that would give them affirmation to say, oh, the government is doing well. When, of course, they were acting on the interest of the government not on the community. That went on and on and on, and for 10 years nothing but a big dog walking park was ever built in Corner Brook.

Now, Madam Chair, this government is committed to finishing that particular project. It has not committed to just continuing the planning, the necessary planning for Western Memorial Regional Hospital replacement in Corner Brook, it's committed to completing the planning for Western Memorial Regional Hospital in Corner Brook. That, I think, is a welcome change in direction for that particular project after 10 years of being deceived, after 10 years of having that project just pushed down the road, wasted money.

I can't remember if it's three or four different consulting firms, each one replacing the other, perpetuated that cycle of work, never actually completing the work. What that caused was \$25 million in expenditures to be incurred, and that, Madam Chair, is quite a legacy the Progressive

Conservative Party of Newfoundland and Labrador will have to carry with them for many, many years to come. Because I think if anyone, if any PC were ever to walk into Corner Brook and suggest they were the ones that advanced this project and they were the ones that would complete the project, I can tell you one thing, it wouldn't take very, very long for that person – whoever that may be – to be laughed out of the community and never, ever to be accepted there.

The deceit that occurred over the last 10 years, it was like a Ponzi scheme. It was like trying to create some confidence that the project was occurring. When that confidence started to collapse, you'd haul that plan out and you'd replace it with a new plan. When that confidence started to collapse, then you replace with another new plan. It was like a Ponzi scheme. In fact, it was a decade of deceit for the people of Western Newfoundland.

Now, another project that I think merits discussion is the whole issue of the fixed link between Southern Labrador and the Northern Peninsula. I remember when the former administration – at that point in time, one of the last times that project came to the floor was back in 2002-2003. I happened to be the Minister Responsible for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency.

I remember dealing with Members of that administration who were adamant that this was a priority project. They wanted to invest in a feasibility plan, a smaller scale plan valued at about \$200,000. They said they can't do that unless the federal government pays for 80 per cent. I remember there was such a rush, an enthusiasm for that particular project from right across the entire province. I remember the feedback that was given to me was: well, I guess this project is going to go nowhere because the federal government is never going to come up with that kind of money on a feasibility study for such an abstract project.

Well, Madam Chair, I approved the 80 per cent from the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and I wanted to use that as the model for the project to continue. Now, the federal government has projected about \$120 billion in federal infrastructure funding over the next 20-year period. It seems to me not to plan for that

particular project now would be to say let's turn our back on any potential getting of a major share of that \$120 billion.

That, Madam Chair, I think is a very irresponsible position to take on the part of the Opposition and it's a very responsible position to take on the part of the government, because do you know what? You have to plan for the future. While they say there is no plan in place for economic diversification, if there was one project I could point to which would lead to huge gains in economic diversification for the entire province, it's the fixed-link project, Madam Chair.

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. BYRNE: I know you're a big supporter of that one yourself.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: I remind the hon. Member his time for speaking has expired.

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Cape St. Francis.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. K. PARSONS: I may do that yet, Minister. I may do that again, yes.

It's a privilege to get up here again tonight for, I don't know how many times, and represent the district that elected me to represent the people who elected me from the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis. I love saying that because it really is. When you're home, you really feel what your home means to you. That's what the place Cape St. Francis means to me. It's a beautiful spot.

It's interesting, we are here tonight doing a debate – some Members on the other side are getting up and saying what's on their mind. The minister is after getting up a couple of times, but we still have MHAs, backbenchers that the people of the province would really like to hear their opinion on the budget but they seem like they don't want to get up and talk about it. I always wonder why, because if you were so proud of this budget and so proud of what your

government is doing, do you know what, you'd get up.

Let me tell you something, last year I was up and I spoke all the time. I got up; every time I was asked I was up on my feet in this House of Assembly.

It's amazing you know, you have an opportunity – you say that when you go back to your district, everybody back in the district loves me and I'm the best kind. There is nobody against this budget, yet you just can't get up and speak about it. It's amazing.

We're here now since 7 o'clock this evening debating the budget, debating the levy. It gives you an opportunity to get up and speak on your feet. There are Members across the way who haven't gotten up at all. There are one, two, three, four, five, six, seven Members who haven't. They're here tonight and they had the opportunity to get up and just won't get up and tell their constituents why they're for this budget. That amazes me. It really does amaze me because this is the opportunity you get. When you get in the House of Assembly, this is a chance you get to represent your people, to get up and say what's on your mind, say what you feel. I'm sure there are probably reasons you want to get up and say it, but now I can obviously say there must be reasons why you won't get up. That really does amaze me.

I'm going to go back now to where I was. I just wanted to get that off my chest now first. I want to go back to where I was to earlier. I was talking about my district and investments in my district, just talking about the province. I always like to try to be positive when it comes to things in Newfoundland and Labrador because I believe that we have to show people we have hope, show people out there that good things happening in this province. It's not all doom and gloom.

I know the Minister of Municipal Affairs got up tonight and he talked about somebody saying it's doom and gloom, but it's not all doom and gloom. We have a great education system. Right now, in the province – the Minister of AES said earlier tonight, and he's correct – it's the lowest cost for secondary education in the country. That's great. That's good that our young people

have an opportunity to get an education, but that's investments that we've made over the years. That's not squandering money. That's just good investments we've made over the last number of years in education. That's where your money was going to.

I'll tell you another one, I can always remember, Madam Chair, I have two – they're not children any more, but I guess they're young adults. I can remember when they were going to school. At the time I struggled like a lot of people in Newfoundland and Labrador, and like a lot of people still do today. I always can remember the day that the book list came home. You'd do your best to get some books handed down and whatnot. It was a day that you knew that there were a lot of costs coming your way.

Do you know one of the best things we've ever done for education and for everyone because it puts everyone on that even keel – in education, free school books. I think that was a probably a turning point for a lot in education because it took a lot of stress away from parents. It took a lot of stress away from low-income people, single parents. Sometimes today it's a little bit different than when we were growing up. I know that you'll see the names now; the brand name means so much to children going back and forth to school. The same thing when mine were there, you had to go buy what little Joey had down the road, or little Sally had up the road.

I can always remember the booklets coming home and just thinking what cost this is going to be to me. Where am I going to get the money to pay for these books? Because we'd do anything for our children, there's no doubt in our mind. Bringing in free school books for the children of Newfoundland and Labrador was a great move by this province, great move by our government, great move for us.

There are a lot of things we did. The Minister of Municipal Affairs, we talked about this earlier; I did talk about it. It was the ratios that were charged to municipalities. Another great move, it was a great, fantastic move.

Being a former mayor – I was the Mayor of the Town of Flatrock, and I told this story before. We were looking to get a fire truck. At that time, it was cost shared. It was 50-50. For the Town of

Flatrock with a small budget, it was a huge investment. The truck was like \$235,000. Actually, it was \$260,000. Our share was \$130,000.

As a council, we had to make a big decision. Now, we wanted the fire truck. We looked at all the options we had. We decided that, yes, this is a big move from us, as a small town with a budget of about \$600,000 at the time, to go out and borrow that much money for a fire truck. There were other needs in our town but we felt the volunteer fire department was very active in our community and it was good thing to do.

Then what happened in the later years – at that time in the province there were seven applications in for fire trucks in the whole province because the cost-share ratio was 50-50. Most municipalities couldn't afford it. Once it changed from the 90-10 to the 80-20 and 70-30, how good was that for small municipalities like Flatrock, like Pouch Cove, like Bauline because it gave them the opportunity to go apply for funding.

A great example of that right now in the last couple of years is in the Town of Bauline. If any of you ever get a chance to go to Bauline, go down there. It's absolutely a beautiful, little town. The people down there are deadly. You go down over the hill and just see the ocean. It's scenic like you wouldn't believe.

The minister of Municipal Affairs at the time, the late Dianne Whalen, came down with me because the town hall down there, the old place they had for their town hall was unbelievable. There was mould, the windows were soft. Mrs. Whalen came down. We met with the mayor, Rita King, at the time. We went inside. I remember she said we had to get out because the smell inside was too much.

From that day on, she said: Kevin, we'll do what we can. Let's see what kind of plan we can put in place. That was in 2008. We worked with the Town of Bauline and right now in Bauline – and it opened up last year – an absolutely beautiful town hall. It seats about 125 people. You wouldn't believe how proud they are of that, and every town needs it.

What happened, once they closed down – they used to have to go down to the church; that is where they'd have their public meetings in the church. Their town office, they rented a house and it was the kitchen part with the table that they used for a town office. Now they have a beautiful facility there. It is absolutely beautiful. There are seniors' parties. Actually they have a whole lot of different activities there. They have yoga classes and stuff like this.

They would never been able to afford that only for the cost ratio changed. If they had to pay for it 50-50, they would never have something like that. That is not only in my district. I'm sure it is in every district in the province. There are some good investments after being made in Newfoundland and Labrador and these investments, the 90-10, 80-20 and 70-30 has improved our province.

I tell you where it has really done great improvement is in rural Newfoundland. If you look last year – the minister, I'll ask him because I know he knows. I think last year there were probably about 80 applications or more for fire trucks in this province. You know over the last number of years there was –

AN HON. MEMBER: Seventy-eight.

MR. K. PARSONS: Seventy-eight; yes, I was pretty close. That's a good thing because it shows that the 90-10 people can afford – you know, we all need fire protection.

I only have 20-odd seconds left – our volunteer firefighters, any volunteers but our volunteer firefighters in particular, they deserve the support that they get from government whether it is through new breathing apparatuses or whatever. I tell you there is probably the one volunteer in our community that really goes out there and puts their life on the line for their residents. They are to be applauded and it's a great job that they do and I really want to thank the volunteer firefighters for what they do.

CHAIR (Warr): Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member that his speaking time has expired.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is a pleasure to stand once again and speak to Bill 14. Of course, this is the levy bill. Mr. Chair, I want to just reference a couple of comments that were made by the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills. Let me just say first of all that I always appreciate listening to the minister speak because he is a very eloquent speaker, for sure, and I have to say even when he makes his points, he is always respectful. So I have to give him credit there.

But, Mr. Chair, one of the points that he's made and I've heard the minister make and I've heard other Members make, is this commentary – I guess it's part of the government messaging on this, which is fine – if we were to do nothing we would, in five years, amass a debt of \$27 billion. That was the essence of what the minister said – if we were to do nothing.

It seemed to allude to the fact that it was being suggested by Members over here that we do nothing and that we simply amass \$27 billion in debt. I just want to say for the record, at least from my perspective, I have never said, at no time have I ever said that we should amass \$27 billion in debt. I have never said we should do nothing.

I never heard the Member for Cape St. Francis say we should do nothing. I don't recall hearing the Member for CBS saying we should do nothing. I never heard the Member for Mount Pearl North say we should do nothing or St. John's Centre or St. John's East. Well, I'm not sure, maybe a couple over here, but I can certainly say, from a general point of view, I have not heard it said nor have I been given the impression by anybody over here that we should do nothing and that it's okay to amass a debt of \$27 billion, which is what would happen if we did nothing. Nobody is saying that.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. LANE: I say to the Member for Lab West, I don't know if he's the designated heckler. I got a feeling he's the designated heckler. That's what it seems like. He seems pretty upset. Every

time you speak about anything, he got to be chirping on in. I don't know what it's all about. He's welcome to get up and speak. When he does speak, which is not very often, I never heckle him, never say a word. I never say a word to any of them, but for some reason he has this need to always heckle me.

AN HON. MEMBER: He doesn't like (inaudible).

MR. LANE: Yeah, someone said he doesn't like me. Maybe he doesn't, I don't know. I like him. He's a fine fellow, absolutely.

I know he's a little upset with me these days because I wouldn't support the budget, but it wasn't personal.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. LANE: I just made a decision I couldn't support the budget. He's been upset with me ever since. I never said a word to him. Anyway, that's fine. I still think he's a good Member. I still think he was a great mayor. He was a great president of Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador and all that kind of stuff. I served with him on it, all good.

AN HON. MEMBER: Don't go too far with it.

MR. LANE: No, I'm not going to go too far with it. It's true. I respect the man and what he's done, absolutely.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. LANE: He just seems to have this obsession of being upset with me and I guess I understand why but that's fine. That's fine.

Anyway, Mr. Chair, the point that was made was that there was this inference that for some reason everybody on this side is saying it's okay to amass \$27 billion in debt, and I'm not saying it and I don't think anybody over here is saying that.

We understand that measures have to be taken. We understand that. We understand that status quo is not going to cut it. We totally get that. Absolutely we do, that status quo is not going to cut it. What it comes down to, Mr. Chair, is that there were some different decisions that could have been made and still can be made. That's all that's being said. That is all that's being said is that there were some changes that could have been made and still can be made.

Again, when we talk about education, a lot of the concerns that people have are not monetary concerns. A lot of the concerns that people have around the education system is not a monetary concern. It is simply a choice to proceed at this time with full-day kindergarten, which people believe is being done at the expense of existing programs.

We have issues around, for example, the \$30 million contingency fund. We have a \$30 million contingency fund which we've never had. It's a good idea, we've never had it and we're going to do that but, at the same time, we're going to impose all these taxes and cuts.

We are budgeting based on \$40 oil and we know that for a long time now we've been up to \$50 and so on. So there is no doubt that there is some room there that we could make some adjustments to scale back on some of the taxation and so on.

There are things here that could be done. And the other aspect of it is while we are projecting these numbers of what the debt may be, but if it's 1.8 or if it's 1.85 and if that helps people survive so they are not being taxed to death, maybe that's an option. I'm not saying that you say oh, the heck with it, let's go to 2.7; but if 1.8 is 1.85 so that people can survive through this and you can do it in a rationale way and a reasonable way for people, well, that's an option as well.

Again, to say that we're suggesting you do nothing is certainly not the case. People expected to pay taxes, and people are prepared to pay taxes. The people I've spoken to are certainly prepared to pay their fair share. They just feel that it's gone too far and that's really the issue here.

The other point here that the minister raised, he talked about the Government Renewal Initiative and was saying that at the time the Official Opposition were saying that it was a waste of time, you shouldn't be doing this, you shouldn't be consulting, you're government, start governing. To my recollection, it's true. What was said, I got that same impression, quite frankly. So I think he's right in that point.

The only thing I would say, though, is that it's fine to say that but if you actually go through the exercise of having the Government Renewal Initiative and you have these consultations all over the place, but then you get all this feedback and you don't do what the people are asking you in the feedback or you're just cherry-picking from the feedback, then what's the point of doing it to begin with.

That was something that a number of people had raised with me and I know they've raised with other Members: What is the point of doing the consultations when the feedback you receive and what you actually do are two different things?

Again, as I said when I was up speaking earlier, while there might have been somebody who said income tax is the way to go, and there might have been someone who said gas tax is the way to go, and there might have been someone who said that HST is the way to go, I can guarantee you that there was nobody who said take all of these measures and do them all at the one time. So there's no way that came out of the Government Renewal Initiative. That's why people would say: What is the point of doing the Government Renewal Initiative, going around talking to people, going throughout the province, doing all of this if you're not going to take the feedback and you're going to go totally against what the people are suggesting?

Now, that's not to say that there's nobody who agrees with what is being done. There's at least – what is it? Fourteen per cent is it, I think –

AN HON. MEMBER: Seventeen.

MR. LANE: There are at least 17 per cent of the people that agree with it. We know that. There's at least 17 per cent that agree with it, but I guess the other 83 per cent – I'm assuming they don't agree with it – or whatever the number is. I'm

assuming they don't agree with it. Certainly based on all of the emails and Facebook messages I've received and other Members have received, I think it's fair to say that people are not happy with the decision.

Now that I'm out of time, I'll take my seat. I look forward to speaking once again after we're done.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. KENT: Good morning, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: Good morning.

MR. KENT: It is 4:06 a.m. and if I'm getting a little delirious I apologize, but we're still in good spirits. There's a good atmosphere in the House at the moment, not too much heckling and not too much nastiness, so that's good.

Mr. Chair, as I've been doing throughout the debate, I want to share some more thoughts that constituents, not necessarily my constituents but constituents of some MHA in this House. People of the province have taken the time to express their views and share their concerns and we're using the opportunity presented to us in this debate to bring them forward. I don't necessarily endorse every word that I'm sharing, but I think it's important to –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. KENT: Now the heckling begins.

I think it's important that people's views be heard and be considered. This one reads: I have discussed some potential solutions with my colleagues and have included the following suggestions for changes to the upcoming budget. They have also recommended that I cc the rest of the MHAs in the House so that it is spread far and wide. Please be advised that I do not represent a group nor do I represent the province as a whole. This is just what was suggested to me, as well as some of my own suggestions.

Number one; if the levy is not able to be scrapped completely than the application of the levy must be examined. I'll just pause there for a moment. I think it is worth acknowledging that

government is going to propose some changes to the levy. I trust that this bill will be amended to reflect the recent changes, or perhaps they're already completely incorporated.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. KENT: They're all completely incorporated?

Government has adjusted the levy but we still take exception to the levy. We still believe the levy is problematic, and it's not just the levy we are here to talk about this evening. We are here to talk about the budget overall and the holistic, the total impact of the budget.

Prior to those changes, here's a citizen who's pointing out that the levy must be examined. One person suggested that we not cap the levy; another suggested the levy be scrapped for households making less than \$70,000 annually, especially those with children or dependents. Another person stated that we how define low-income needs to be re-examined. For example, a family with an income of \$55,000 combined, but with a total of five people, three children living in the household will qualify as low-income to most people.

Suggestion number two: scrap all-day kindergarten. While this is definitely something that should be kept on the table for the future, at the moment it is not fair to provide this at the detriment of other children. As one stated, the needs of the many cannot be sacrificed for the benefit of a few. This is a \$13 million cost that could eliminate the need for teacher cuts, multi-grade classrooms and even library closures. I think the number is actually bigger than that. Despite what certain MHAs believe, libraries do have an impact on literacy rates.

Number three: another potential suggestion for the libraries would be to reduce funding for the libraries with municipalities that can afford to support them and then take these funds and apply them to the libraries that are to be closed. Also, eliminate the book tax. If we cannot tax junk food because it was never done before, why add the tax on books? One person suggested including a luxury tax on luxury items. The administrative costs cannot be much different to

administer these types of tax as opposed to a book tax.

Number four: scrap the feasibility study for the Labrador link. This has been done previously and we do not even have the Trans-Labrador Highway fully paved at this point. Use this money towards reinstating the Labrador Food Airlift Subsidy. This service can literally prevent people from starving.

Number five: one person suggested we increase income tax for households earning more than \$200,000, reinstate the emergency dental plan, reduce all higher echelon public servant salaries more than \$200,000 by 10 per cent, and reduce MHAs salary and benefit packages.

Number six: another individual states that the dental and prescription drug plan – as it's stated here – need to remain in effect as well as the Home Heating Rebate Program. These programs support some of the most vulnerable individuals in our communities and these programs can prevent future health care costs by insuring that an individual gets the dental and medications they require. People will have to cut their budgets somewhere and no one should have to choose between dental care or food, medication or rent, heating or electricity. This is demoralizing and degrading for people who have already experienced much adversity.

Number seven: another person stated that we need to reduce handouts to businesses. Specifically, they suggest we cancel the increase to subsidies to other departments and Crown agencies. Do not double potential loans, advances and investments for private businesses to \$10.7 million. Do not introduce \$20 million in grants for businesses to be distributed without any legislative oversight and to increase the corporate tax rate.

Number eight: municipality 100 per cent incorporation. If water and sewer are not available, infrastructure have that reflected in the mill rates and appraisal process.

Number nine: do your own negotiations with the unions. We do not need to pay for contracts to be negotiated twice.

Number 10: re-examine the MHA pension plan, require a full eight years to earn it and only allow it to be active at retirement. Cap it out at 50 per cent.

Number 11: work on agricultural independence, especially in rural areas of the province.

AN HON. MEMBER: I agree.

MR. KENT: Me too. I agree too. So let's work together to make it happen. In fact, on that particular point, the Minister Responsible for the Forestry and Agrifoods Agency and I have had some productive discussions. I think we share some of the same philosophies on what's possible in the agriculture sector.

I think it's an area where there's no need for anybody to play politics. We have major issues around our food supply and food security. We have far more land that could be used for agriculture if we committed the resources to doing so. I think it's a point that is worth pursuing further.

When we were in government, it's an issue we tried to advance. I have no doubt the new government is trying to advance it as well. It's an area where we should be working together.

Number 12: energy self-sufficiency doesn't have to be via a mega project. Investigate solutions that could be implemented on a community or household basis and give tax credits to those who install them and let them share excess energy with their community.

I firmly believe the Muskrat Falls Project is a necessary project, but this concept of solutions on a community or household basis and allowing people to share excess energy with their community and feed it back into the system is worth talking about for sure.

Number 13: do not eliminate the Student Grant Program. We need our young people to stay and stimulate our economy. They will not be able to afford to do so if this budget goes into place in its current configuration.

These are just the suggestions I have for the budget after asking for feedback from some individuals in my circle of friends and

acquaintances. This is not a complete list, nor does it include other concerns about recall legislation, transparency in government, especially when it comes to financial and economic concerns, as well as the general concern that the voices of the people of this province are being ignored.

As I have said in my previous email, austerity budgets kill people. They have been linked with poor health outcomes, increases in suicide rates, mental health concerns and heart disease. We cannot survive more of this kind of traditional slash and cut budgeting. Economists have concluded that austerity does not work and that it will only worsen recessions and poor economies. We don't want to see how bad this can get in another three and a half years.

I appreciate you taking the time to address these concerns and look forward to you bringing these concerns forward.

So, Mr. Chair, there are citizens out there with good ideas. Some of the ideas, multiple parties in this House of Assembly agree upon. It just goes to show that there are things we can work on together. Despite the negativity that this budget creates, there are still some issues that we need to tackle in spite of that. There are some changes that could be made to the budget to address some of these issues as well.

I see my time is up and I look forward to the next opportunity to participate in the debate.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It is good to get up to speak again on this levy. Keeping with the theme of the budget, I also wanted to note that, as my colleague for Cape St. Francis pointed out, we have numerous Members who have neglected to take the opportunity to get up and speak. They tell us all the time in the House they are very proud of the budget and they have no problem speaking about it, so I encourage each and every one to take the opportunity. We have a long night yet.

In between us speaking, I'm sure they will find time and they can get up any time they want.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. PETTEN: I agree with that.

Anyway, Mr. Chair, I must digress. On the budget, some regional health authority impacts of the budget and I am going to get some emails then. Under Eastern Health, they announced the annualized savings of \$19 million; the elimination of approximately 107 full-time equivalent positions –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. PETTEN: Included in that, Mr. Chair, closure of 10-bed residential units at the Waterford Hospital, residents transferred to Pleasantview; new model for Psychiatric Emergency Service; Health Sciences will use Janeway services; closing Masonic Park, 40 long-term care beds, residents will move to vacant beds at the Veterans Pavilion; changes to X-ray services in communities as follows: Placentia, St. Lawrence, Old Perlican, Grand Bank, Bonavista; hours are reduced to 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday to Friday, no X-rays available on weekends or off-hours.

The breast cancer screening program changes, as my colleague from Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune has been very vocal on that issue. It can be done, of course, by a physician requisition but the automatic screening is no longer available.

On that note, I had the opportunity, I was at an event there a few weeks back and this lady – I may have met her once or twice and I knew her to see her but we didn't know each other. As she sat next to me, she engaged in conversation and she quickly flipped off into the breast cancer screening. We had a conversation – my wife was with me, and she went into great detail to tell me she was 37 years old and she is a breast cancer survivor. Of course that instantly gives you that pause and reflect. You are taken back by it. I think she actually wrote the minister afterwards. She said she planning to. She was very disturbed over this breast cancer screening.

Now, she was in her 30s when she was diagnosed but her family were into this breast cancer screening – they were older. She had sisters in their 40s. Obviously she was 37 years old and she was diagnosed I believe when she was 35, 36. It was very important – it was a very sensitive issue for her.

I'm no expert. The Minister of Health and Community Services is a much better expert on this than I think most of us in the House, but it's hard to rationalize cutting a program such as that, because it is a very personal, a very sensitive issue to people in the province. We just went through – a few years back we all remember the breast cancer inquiry. I just don't know why we would ever think about something like that.

Anyway, that's my opinion on that, Mr. Chair. I don't anticipate our caucus's opinion on the breast cancer screening will change any time soon.

We also had the centralization of laundry services, Pleasantville; six full-time equivalent positions eliminated in Bonavista, Placentia and Burin; reduced the number of in-patient beds in Burin Peninsula Health Care Centre – reduced by six beds. There are a total of 28 beds, with no layoffs, which is a good thing.

There is a new food service delivery for acute care hospitals: Health Sciences, St. Clare's and the Miller Centre; employees reduced by 23; Central Health, they eliminated 15.6 positions, projected savings of \$1.5 million.

I want to get to some of my emails, but I say it again, it just backs it up, this budget has affected every single person and there are cuts in almost every single area. That was Eastern Health. I have some breakdown of Central Health, Labrador-Grenfell and Western Health.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to read some emails. My colleagues have been doing so. I have a lot of emails here. I've read some over the past during the budget debate. I feel it's important to read as many as possible.

This email says: I'm a resident of Conception Bay South, a single mom of two teenage boys, who currently works a full-time job of 28 hours

a week and a 28 hour a week part-time job. I live from cheque to cheque. I kill myself a little every day at a physically intensive job to keep a decent home for my boys, pay my bills and keep food in the fridge. Most weeks – days before my cheque comes in – I'm out of money, milk and fruit, but we get by.

Can you tell me – I'm not allowed to say my name, so guess – how myself and my children will get by after this budget goes through? Do I just give up and go on Income Support, because I physically can't work any longer hours or any harder? Do I pack up my children and leave because my own government is forcing me out, robbing me blind?

My sons will soon be of working age and it will (inaudible) a bit and I watch them leave their home and their mom behind because they just can't afford to live here. Am I to watch my already struggling parents who have worked through four diagnoses of terminal cancer to get to their senior years, to live cold and hungry after a lifetime of hard work?

Again – my name – I guarantee you, you've never met a man who faced an illness and struggle as my dad and still worked 12- to 14-hour days in an iron ore mine during treatment for terminal cancer. We are a hard-working, struggling family and this budget will be the end of us.

I would like to know if we have a representative who is going to stand up for his people in a desperate time. Will you help us fight this terrible budget? Where do you stand on it? I've never been so scared for our future, not only as a family but as a province.

Mr. Chair, that's pretty to the point. That's pretty heartfelt. I don't know this person. Obviously, they refer to me as mister, so they don't me. I don't know these people. That's pretty to the point. I don't think anyone can dispute that's from the heart. That email is very raw. That's why I felt it's important to read some of these people's emails because they deserve that.

I'll read another email, Mr. Chair: I'm sure you have received many letters from your constituents regarding *Budget 2016* and I feel

compelled to add my voice to the matter. Personally, I cannot recall a time when I felt so stressed and anxious about my family's future in Newfoundland.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. PETTEN: It seems that every day there is a new fear added to my list of fears regarding our futures here. I worry about how I'll be able to afford and provide for my children. I worry I will have to cut back on their extra circulars, cut them out altogether. I worry I'll no longer be able to provide healthy food.

I worry we'll will no longer be able to participate in special activities together. Trips to The Rooms will be cut out for us – something I've enjoyed doing with them on the free Saturdays, they are now cut. These trips to the beach in the summer we'll no longer be able to take if we can't afford the extra money for gas. I fear all these things we will miss out on, the little things I enjoy providing for them.

We never took trips to Disney, but we did take trips throughout the province. I fear this will rarely happen now. I worry my husband will lose his job. He's a public service worker and, for us, the future looks grim. We both feel we'll be forced into bankruptcy if he loses his job. The thought keeps me up at night as I wait for the fall budget and to find out we can't afford to keep a roof over our heads.

I worry about my children's education. I have a daughter entering kindergarten in 2016 and I have no idea how it will be implemented. The school staff seems to have no idea either; we wait to find out. I have a son entering grade three next year. I worry he will be in a split class without his peers. Will his education falter? How will this all affect him? I have no idea, so I wait to find out what his class allocation will look like. I worry so much for their education and well-being.

I know there are no easy answers, but there must be some way we can fix the budget without negatively affecting the lives of everyone in this province. I urge you to voice your concerns you have been receiving from your constituents. I

hope we can find a way to better our economy. I hope that I and the many other Newfoundlanders in similar situations will be able to find some peace of mind in the coming months.

Mr. Chair, I'll read some more as the night goes on, but that's a sample of pretty raw emails.

Thank you very much.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island.

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's indeed an honour to stand once again and for the next 10 minutes talk about the Liberal levy and the bill that we are debated here now and the impact it is going to have on the people of this province. As my colleagues have been doing, we'll talk about some of the impacts but then we'll obviously read some correspondence we've had from people to really bring it home, and to outline exactly to the Members opposite and to the people listening at home and watching, what impact this is going to have on people. No doubt, it will outline other approaches or other concerns that people have and then it will show, to another further degree, how this resonates with the general population all over our province.

So, I'll just read this one, Mr. Chair, and then I'll have a little discussion around my interpretation of the impact it's going to have on this family.

To the Minister of Education: I'm writing this as a very concerned parent – one of many you have heard from, I am sure of, over the last couple of weeks. My son is a grade five student at Mary Queen of the World in Mount Pearl. He completed his registration to be enrolled in the Intensive Core French program for September when he starts grade six. This is an excellent program that would prepare him for the late French immersion, if he so chooses. His sister completed this a couple of years ago and is now completing grade eight late French immersion with a 90 per cent average.

Because of cuts your government has made, it's not our government anymore because you certainly are not putting the kids' best interest

first. My son may now be denied this program if his name is the unfortunate one to be drawn from a hat tomorrow. There are currently 31 students interested in this program at Mary Queen of Peace, but only 28 are able to be enrolled. Three children will miss the student interest in this program and will miss the opportunity so rightfully deserved.

Also, I'm very concerned that no one is looking at academics or attendance when deciding who gets the opportunity. It is just a blind draw. You may end up with the three brightest students who never miss school denied the Intensive Core French program. What kind of message does this send to these children? To think that these children will be denied access to the late French immersion program in grade seven is unrealistic. Not only does the Intensive Core French program prepare them for the late French immersion, it gives them an opportunity to decide if there is something they really want to do.

I know this letter is not going to change things or make decisions to be reversed, but I really felt like I needed to vent some frustration as a concerned parent. When the election was being held, I heard so many people say it don't matter who is in government, they are all the same. I continuously said: give them a chance.

Your government has now turned me into one of those naysayers. I have no faith left. Increased taxes, the levy, et cetera, all were not welcome but I could live with them. I can't live with our children being looked at as economics and numbers.

I really hope at the end of the day you can look at what decisions you have made and feel like you have put our children first. From where I stand as a parent, I really don't think that's possible. We elected you so you could speak for the people of the province, but when it comes to cuts that have effects on our children it's gone way too far.

A very disappointed and concerned parent.

Mr. Chair, this is reflective of the hundreds that we've received around education, particularly Intensive Core French programs, the overcrowding in schools, the blending of

classrooms. It obviously says to us that parents have a real concern about the quality of education we're going to have in the future.

Some of the issues we're talking about now and it has been brought to me by a number of educators and parents, particularly around the blending of classrooms – and we've always had a ceiling. We've always had a scoring concept around performance and making sure we were competitive in the rest of the country and our scores were up.

If we're going to go into blended classrooms now, does that mean the score goes down? Because it's based on a ratio of student-teacher ratios, how many kids in those classrooms may need special assistance, what kind of programs are being offered. If some of these kids now have less access to Intensive Core French, if they're in blended classrooms, if there are now more kids who have some special challenges, which means the ability for teacher ratio and being a special assistant and special help is minimized, then, obviously, that's going to have a major impact on what the performance of those children is going to be.

If there are some gifted kids there, some kids who can excel but now that won't be identified because the numbers with the cap sizes being increased and the other challenges in the classroom, teachers won't be able to identify those type of students and be able to encourage them and engage them at a higher level of learning.

The parents have some very, very, very interesting concerns but some very legitimate ones. It's all about one simple concept: the quality of our education. It's all about one simple process: about moving our education system forward and not backward.

Not one parent that I've heard from – and I very much doubt that it's been heard from any other Member on that side or the Minister of Education – has said, yes, we welcome all these cuts, these regressive programs, this amalgamation, because we feel that's going to enhance our education system.

I've had a few who've said we agree with all-day kindergarten but I'm fearful that while it

will help me now, my kid will suffer or my nephew will suffer or my older child will suffer because this is going to have negative impact on the programs and services we offer in the school system.

Rightfully so, it's been proven. The educators have said it. The school districts themselves have said it. I've had conversations with senior people in the school district who've said they're not ready for it. Teachers haven't been trained. Administrators have said we have trained teachers in blended classrooms. That's a specific talent you got to have, to be able to adjust your curriculum around those types of things. You just don't jump into that because it's a different setting, a different approach to education and not to have proper training in place.

I'm not saying – because we've been doing it in other areas in this province for various reasons, but particularly to ensure that the minimal resources we have in those particular areas, particularly small, rural, isolated areas, are better used so that the students there have a better access to a more open concept of education. But to take it and move it backwards, particularly for teachers who that hasn't been their course of study, that hasn't been what they've – in the classroom for the last 10, 15, 20 years and now all of a sudden you are going to ask them to do something totally different.

So the first year into that process is going to be a learning process for not only the students, but for the educators – and to what degree? The degree I would assume and I'm being told by those who have a background in that is at the expense of the scoring for our students. The ability for those kids to be able to move to the next level at the level we want to be and be competitive.

So it's not an acceptable process. It's not something that anybody here accepts. We, on this side of the House, and I know the educators – as you can see, I have had an onslaught of papers and files here because they come from every background. They didn't come from other jurisdictions who've been reading what we're doing and have said here is some of the data and some of the research.

I've never wanted to get into an argument with the minister about every time he presents a piece of data that says research shows this. Well, I can show five more that says research shows something the opposite. We don't want to get into that. What we want to do is get everybody on the same page to realize what we are trying to do is improve our children's education process. If it means we have to readjust some of our spending in another category, in another area outside of education, then so be it. That's why you were hired to government; you were hired to make the decisions that may be harsh at some times but are not going to be detrimental. Your objective was to move the province forward.

Regressive decisions like this are doing damage. I'm fortunate enough I don't have children in the primary and secondary school system. My daughter graduates this week and she is going to go on to a second-degree program. My other daughter has graduated. They were fortunate enough to get through with what I thought and I still believe was a great education system.

I didn't think we were that regressive. I didn't think we were that behind. The minister has touted that at some times we need to catch up. Maybe there are some scorings there that we were weaker in, but I think we do all right. I think we produce some of the greatest engineers and writers and doctors and professionals and tradespeople. And every other field that you can do out there in the world, we compete against them and we excel.

I didn't think that we needed to really change how we do everything because we are behind in some category. What I thought we needed to do was continue what we are doing because it has been successful, tweak where it needs to be, offer more programs and services to people who don't have access to them. Find better ways to use technology, better ways to engage people, better ways to use the community to support our education system and better ways to make sure that everybody has an opportunity to be provided with the quality of education that they think is acceptable for them.

The acceptability here, particularly in some of these programs, is that they have choices: Intensive Core French programs; not being in overcrowded schools; having cafeterias where

they can actually socialize and eat in an environment and get out of their classroom setting; have gymnasiums that are accessible; have music rooms where they can learn another variety of the arts, these types of things; have home economic rooms.

All these types of things that should be available in our school system are being put backwards because we're not investing in the right areas. We're going on a concept that something we've never had is more important than the things we've had, that have gotten us to a point where we're competitive, gotten us to a point where our education system has been seen as something that is positive, no matter what part of the province you live in.

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: Mr. Chair, I'll have a chance to speak again before the night is out.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

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

Again, it's a pleasure to get up here and represent the district I represent, the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis. The last couple times up I've talked about investments that government made over a number of years that have been positive towards our towns and our people in the district. So far, I've talked about the Jack Byrne Arena and the positive thing that was in the area. I'm just touching on a few things in my own district. I talked about the education system and the improvements to the education system.

I think when you talk about education, you can go back right through the whole province and look at where we were in the '90s. I can remember going and listening to the *Open Line* shows at the time and the biggest issue with education back in the '90s was mould in schools, leaky roofs and schools basically falling down around people's ears, unsafe for children to be in, parents were out protesting every day. It was

a huge problem. Back then, you can say the finances weren't where they were in the 2000s.

We've come a long way in education. We've come a long way in schools. I know the Member for Bell Island told me earlier the other day I think it was 15 schools have been built, eight more under construction and a lot more in planning. Those are the investment that, as a province, we had to make.

There are two new schools in my district. I know there is a new school down your way also in your district that was built over the last number of years. That's really good for the education system. Those were investments. Those were not squandering money because you hear the other side say you squandered money.

Well, any time we invest in building new schools or improvement in our education system, that's not squandering. That's giving our children, who deserve the best possible education they can have. I'm convinced we have the best possible teachers. We have great teachers in this province. They work hard with students.

When you talk to teachers, they really appreciate the tools they have to do their job. We reduced cap sizes in classes, came down to where teachers really felt good about going in the classroom knowing that they didn't have too many students, that they could give the attention to the children that really needed it. I would imagine in most classes it is just like anywhere else that you'll have whether it's 23 or 24 to 26 students in that class and there are some children that will grasp everything and they get it really good, they get the first time and stuff like that. There are some children that struggle a little bit. It takes a little bit of work, and probably it's help from parents or they just have to work a little bit harder to get what the other students get.

Then you have some students that are in those classes that really need that special attention. They really need that one on one that the teacher provides in the classroom. That's something that is so important. When you talk to teachers that's where they talk about you're stepping backwards. You're going backwards in education. Because what they're telling me is the way that it is now, we can do our job. We

have a job to do. Like I just explained there's some children in that class that don't require the attention that other children do.

But for those ones that do require the attention, the more that you put in a class or you combine classes and whatnot, the harder it is going to be on the ones that can't get through the system; they need that extra help. By increasing cap sizes, you're putting the teachers in that position where they can't do their job properly. They really can't do their job properly.

That's sad because our education is so important to us. I'm in full support of full-day kindergarten. I think full-day kindergarten should be part of our education system but right now when we're doing these cuts and cutting the size of our classes and putting extra strain on teachers that have to do combined classes – I'm going to talk about this later on because I have two or three petitions here I want to touch base on from parents and what the parents are telling me.

I think it's a step backwards in our education system. I really believe that we should hold off on full-day kindergarten. The minister got up there the other day and I think he said 75 per cent of the councils and teachers and parents he is talking to don't, but 25 per cent still want to go ahead. That percentage tells me that that's a lot of people – 75 per cent of the people out of there and councils are telling you, listen, we're looking at the education, we understand the fiscal situation the province is in and right now our opinion is that education is too important to make steps going backwards – instead of moving ahead, going backwards. That's what parents are saying and school councils right across the province, in every district in the province, they'll tell you that we'll put up with it, we'll hold off on same-day kindergarten for a few years until –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. K. PARSONS: Full-day kindergarten, Minister. I call it same day; it's full-day kindergarten (inaudible) –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. K. PARSONS: Full-day kindergarten, it's important to our system. But if you give the parents a choice, if you went out and talked to all of the school councils in this province right now and talk to parents, give them a choice and say listen, here's the X number of dollars we have to spend on our education and see what they choose. Would they choose to say we'll go with full-day kindergarten and we'll increase the cap sizes? I bet not. I bet that the parents understand the needs. They understand that a child that goes in that class, any extra attention that child can get is better for the children.

Full-day kindergarten is a great thing but right now, most parents will tell you, and the minister is getting emails from all school councils – I know that Mary Queen of Peace gave me a petition with over 600 names they have now on their petition; 600 names from people in that school saying we don't want see combined classes. We want to keep our core French. We don't want to have the cap sizes increased; delay full-day kindergarten. That's what they're asking, but that's the whole thing with this whole budget that people in the province, the reason why people are so frustrated and the reason why they lost so much trust in the government across the way is because they don't listen, and they won't listen to parents and they won't listen to the students.

People are protesting. They are out there – I know I went to three different silent protests in the schools and people want to be heard. The children are out; everyone is out listening to them – the minister is over there laughing to kill himself because he don't care. He just don't care. He don't care about what the parents' concerns are; he really don't. If he wanted to listen to the parents he'd – he just really doesn't care about the school councils in this province. That's sad because school councils put a lot of work into their schools. They do a lot of work, they are all volunteers, they go to all of these meetings and their number one concern, bar none, is the students, the children going to school. They represent all the schools all over the province.

When you hear that 75 per cent of them are saying hold off on full-day kindergarten, don't do the cuts you're doing to the education system. We're looking at busing starting now with

children – there're some districts where busing has to start early. There's no doubt about it because there's a long commute back and forth to the schools. Right now, in Torbay and the Southern Shore where they're changing the bus routes, it looks like the children are going to be picked up 56 days in the dark. You're talking an area like Torbay where there are 10,000 or 12,000 cars going along the main road in the morning in a rush to go to work and you're going to put kindergarteners to grade sixes on the road in the dark.

That's why parents have concerns. They're concerned about the safety of their children. They're not complaining and doing all these protests just to protest. They're concerned about their children. They want the best possible – we all do. Everybody in here who has a child or anyone who's going through education, grandchild or whatever that's in the education system, they just want the best for their children. That's why they're out protesting. They're not out protesting just to protest because that's not the way it is. They want the best possible education. They want the best possible results for their children. They're not out just to say let's go out now at 7 in the morning out by Mary Queen of Peace. We'll get all the children out and we'll just protest just to protest. That's not what they're at it for.

It's time that government just started listening to the people. They have to start listening and get out of the bubble that you're in and listen to what the people are trying to tell you. There are changes you can make. You all know it. There are all kinds of changes you can make. That's all they're doing is just asking you to do so.

MR. JOYCE: Come on; tell us the two resumes you gave us.

CHAIR: I recognize the hon. the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands.

MR. LANE: Did they get a job? Good, I hope they did.

MR. JOYCE: You're so concerned about your constituents.

MR. LANE: Anyway, Mr. Chair, it's great to stand once again and speak to Bill 14. This is the

levy bill, but of course it ties into the whole budget so I want to pick up where my colleague for Cape St. Francis was, talking about education. I want to talk about a school in my district, the school being St. Peter's Primary.

Now, of course, before being St. Peter's Primary, it was actually St. Peter's Elementary.

MR. KENT: But before that it was St. Peter's Primary.

MR. LANE: My colleague for Mount Pearl North reminds me that before that it was actually St. Peter's Primary. So it went from primary to elementary, now we're back to primary.

I want to talk about when it was elementary a couple of years ago, first of all. I can remember standing in this House of Assembly at the time and the concerns that were raised under the school reorganization. That was done under the other administration, not this administration. It was done under the former administration. At the time they were going through the school reorganization process. At the time St. Peter's was an elementary K to six, Newtown was a K to six and the decision was made to make Newtown a four to six and St. Peter's a K to three.

I can remember at the time standing in this House –and, originally, Minister Jackman was the minister of Education at the time. I can remember standing here and presenting numerous petitions on behalf of parents who had concerns, on behalf of school councils who had concerns, teachers and administration who had concerns about the reorganization and all the negative impacts that would result from that reorganization and making a bad situation worse.

At the time in St. Peter's Elementary, we had a situation where there was no lunch room because the lunch room was being used as a second gymnasium. The lunch room was being used as a music room. Kids were eating at their desks. They had gotten rid of, I believe, the resource, the library. They had a computer room, they had to get rid of that, and they were bringing what they called a portable IT centre or whatever to the classrooms. Space was at a premium. They were just jam packed.

Like I said, everybody was very concerned about it. When they proposed school reorganization, they actually made things worse. The school board were making proposals which everybody felt or certainly the parents, the school council, the administration felt would make things worse.

I can remember standing in the House of Assembly with petitions and speaking on it every day. I had public meetings and did all I could do to try to change that. To the credit of the Member for Mount Pearl North, he was actually a part of the government at the time and he actually spoke out against his own government on that particular thing. And he never got tossed for it; that was interesting. He did speak out against his own government, but nothing changed unfortunately. It still went through; the school board made their decision. I can remember it started with Minister Jackman, then later Minister King, and at the end of the day there were no changes made.

It was predicted at the time that this was a mistake and it wasn't going to fix the issue around space and so on, if anything it would get worse. We fast forward to now and it has gotten worse. What you have now is younger children because before you had a mixture of K to six, now they're all K to three. So they're all much younger. That means none of them are walking to school. They're all being dropped off. There is more congestion on the parking lot. The issues around like having the older kids as prefects and helping out with the younger kids, all of that was eliminated. There were a number of things that have had a negative impact.

That was done under the former administration. Well, it was done by the school board while the former administration was in place, but we come to today and things have gotten worse. To make things worse again, now we're proposing, in that particular case, to proceed with full-day kindergarten. Despite the argument about full-day kindergarten would be a good thing, despite the argument about the budget and all those things, just from a practical point of view, many would argue that St. Peter's Primary is not prepared, not able to house all those additional kids into full-day kindergarten.

There's no doubt, there are plans in place to put in a new gymnasium. I'm glad that's going to happen. That's all good. That was planned under the former administration and this administration is going to continue on. That's going to happen. When the new gym gets built then the existing gym is going to be divided up into more classroom space and a new cafeteria. It won't be a full cafeteria that all kids can use but it'll be a smaller cafeteria that at least, maybe every other day or whatever, they can at least have a cafeteria as opposed to eating at their desk every day. So these are good things which will happen over the next couple of years. In the meantime, we're going to have kids jammed into a classroom.

We look at the full-day kindergarten, they're looking at a small classroom of 28 kids and two teachers. That's 30 bodies. I made some inquiries to see, does this fit the standard? If we were to build a new school, in terms of the space per child would be double what it is going to be at St. Peter's elementary. It would be double. We know it's an existing school, but even in terms of an existing school, I said is there a proper ratio per child? What I heard and what I got back from officials is the fire department said it passes. Now, that has nothing to do with proper space to do play-based learning and all that kind of stuff. That's just saying from a fire perspective, the number of bodies per square foot passes.

I said, so does it just pass or do we have a lot – then I was told there is a ratio but they were kind of applying in some of these classrooms the fact that even if it's under the recommended ratio for fire, if it's under that ratio for fire, there's another provision that says this should be the ratio, but if it's under this, depending on the layout and access and egress and so on, we can still pass it. That's kind of where we're at.

We're at not ideal for teaching, half the size of what would be in a new school. Now we're down to the level of, from a fire perspective, it's being passed, but based on the fact that not the square footage so much as this provision of, well, because of access and egress and the layout, we can manage to pass it.

Now, I'm still looking into it because I've talked to the fire department about it. I think they're

planning on going back again. I'm certainly requesting they go back again. I know there are concerns they have about even making it barely pass the minimum, I was told by the fire department would mean there could be nothing in the classroom because there were books and materials and whatever. The place had to be, basically, totally empty for it to even pass that.

MR. KENT: What about tearing down the cloakrooms?

MR. LANE: They're even tearing down the cloakrooms and everything. So it's debateable, quite frankly, if we're even meeting that very, very minimum requirement.

When we talk about full-day kindergarten and so on, we acknowledge it's a good thing but in the case of this particular school, it's really being questioned: Can we even accommodate it? Will we be ready? Can we accommodate it?

This is not my concern. These are the concerns of the school council, of the parents and so on. I'm sure the Member for Mount Pearl North can confirm what I'm saying because he's met them as well. We both have children –

AN HON. MEMBER: Team.

MR. LANE: Yes, we are a team when it comes to those things. Absolutely, I say to the Member. We are, because I have kids who go to that school and he has kids who go to that school. So why wouldn't we? You can't work together. We have constituents going to the same school. We're not supposed to talk to each other. We're not supposed to work together. How foolish is that?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. LANE: I would say, Mr. Chair, I intend to work with whoever I need to work with to make sure my constituents, and certainly the children in the schools that are in my district are looked after.

CHAIR: I remind the hon. Member that his speaking time has expired.

MR. LANE: Thank you.

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. KENT: It's interesting, Mr. Chair, to hear the heckling from Liberal Members who are making bold predictions about the political future of the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands. Well, Mr. Chair, I can tell you, I've known the man a long time and several years ago I gave up making predictions about that man's political future. I caution Members in the bold predictions they're making here this evening.

On a more serious note, just to pick up on what my colleague was saying. Yes, we do work together. Regardless of which side of the House we've sat on, we've continued to put our constituents first, and I think that's an important principle in this business. So yes, whether we've been in the same caucus or in different caucuses, or one of us has been in a caucus and one of us has not been in a caucus, we still work hard to advance the interests of our community and the people who live there.

When it comes to these issues in the schools, it doesn't matter whether the building is in his district or mine, it doesn't matter whether the students come from his district or mine. In most cases the schools are a blend of two districts. We work together to make sure that our constituent's concerns are addressed. That's proven to be an effective approach for us.

There are certain things in our communities and in the lives of our constituents that really have to transcend politics and the education of our students is something we're not interested in playing politics with. It may appear that way to some. I have no doubt, especially given the level of interest there is in the issues in the budget related to education, but we have legitimate concerns about what's going on in the schools in our community that we're bringing forward on almost a daily basis to the House of Assembly.

St. Peter's Primary is probably the worst case based on all of the concerns that exist there with overcrowding and now the impacts of this budget. I've raised concerns, as has my colleague, on behalf of St. Peter's Junior High.

We've raised concerns on behalf of Mary Queen of the World school.

There are lots of issues coming out of this budget that affect the education system in our province and we're seeing those issues in our own districts in Mount Pearl. So I'm glad to continue to raise those issues in the House of Assembly, and I look forward to continuing to work with my colleague in doing so.

I want to continue to raise concerns that have been sent to us by constituents, by residents of Newfoundland and Labrador over the last month or so.

The next one reads – another one that was sent to all MHAs – I've been a resident of Newfoundland and Labrador my whole life and I wanted to give you some insight into what your proposed budget is going to do to myself and my family. First, both myself and my husband are working professionals. I work for a service company who does contract service work for oil companies and my husband teaches physics labs at the university. We have what some people would call good jobs. We have two small kids; one is five years old and in kindergarten and my youngest is three years old and in daycare.

We own our home in St. Philip's and have usual bills: mortgage, power, phone, Internet, daycare, cellphones, car payment, propane, student loans, et cetera. We would be classified as middle-class citizens, with a combined household income of slightly more than \$100,000. Due to the decline in oil prices, my income has already been decreased by 25 per cent, bringing us to a current annual take-home income of approximately \$80,000. For a family of four, that is already tight.

We have never been on vacation, still have student loans and are still trying to pay off the debt that having two kids in daycare put us in. I'm already stressed out with our current financial situation and this budget is adding more stress to my already maxed out stress level. I haven't stopped grinding my teeth for weeks.

If this budget is approved after all our bills are paid we are left with \$230 a week; \$920 a month for those who think better in months for the following items: groceries, paying into the

children's post-secondary education fund. We don't need to worry about their future, right? Taking out the money we currently put into the education fund, we'd be down to \$180 a week. Extra-curricular activities for the children, I guess learning to swim isn't an important skill, right? School supplies, Christmas, birthdays, clothes and shoes for four people – kids don't grow right?

Home improvements, car maintenance, pet emergencies, medical expenses, personal hygiene – who needs haircuts? I need less than I used to, as does the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands. Appropriate seasonal outdoor clothing and we have good jobs. I don't know about you but this budget is going to bankrupt us. Our children won't always get quality food. We will have to choose between birthday presents for our children and putting food on the table. Christmas is already financially stressful. Our car maintenance will put us in debt. Any house repairs will put us further in debt. We have aging pets; vet visits will be out of the question. All this just to stay out of bankruptcy.

We already have a tight budget and our biggest luxury is coffee at Starbucks. We barely eat out and already second-guess spending money on family outings and extracurricular activities for our children. We have never been able to afford a family vacation and we're hoping to finally be able to make that a reality in one to two years' time.

If this budget is pushed through, that won't be possible. We have been working hard for the average life we have and trying to claw ourselves out of debt as it is. This budget is like a kick in the teeth to those of us who already have to fight for what we have. I don't know if you expect our economy to hold strong during these next few years, but most of your residents won't be able to afford to spend any money on anything that will support it.

We work hard for the little bit of money we make and it isn't right for us to have it all taken from us. This levy, aka, cover charge for living in this province, is unacceptable. It is not my fault that the government and others in a position of power misspent their money. It is not my fault that the current government is continuing the trend of favouritism towards

those with money. It is certainly not my fault that people in management positions are overpaid.

This levy is unfairly distributed across the various income brackets. My household is looking at paying at least \$1,200, and as much as \$1,400 for this levy, whereas someone who makes more than double our combined annual income is only paying \$900, going on the assumption that only one person is working when the other is a high-income earner, as is most often the case. I am paying over 1 per cent of my salary for this levy, where the high-income earners are asked to pay less than 0.5 per cent. This just doesn't make sense.

I'm not against raising HST or increasing income tax across the board even, but both? Can't you give us a chance to see even a little bit of a reward for what we worked so hard for? I am against taxing books. I am against raising fees for every little thing we like to do to enjoy our province. Raising fees for birth and death certificates is a low blow to already stressful situations. I'm against making cuts from the bottom when those at the top are already overpaid. Seriously, how can anyone justify paying someone over \$400,000 a year when we are in this economic state?

Making cuts to the education system is wrong. The education system is already stretched thin and those people who are making these decisions obviously have their priorities backwards. This government seems to be setting up this province's next generation to not be properly educated. Multigrade classrooms are not necessary if you cut from places that have redundancies. Why don't you look at administrative positions where there are several people doing the same job? Get an audit on the way the university is staffed if you're curious as to what I mean here.

Making cuts to health care is also wrong. Where are their priorities? I am against unfair treatment of the middle-class and poorest people of the province. Boo-hoo, the wealthy may have to book a lower class hotel on their bi-yearly vacations, sit in coach instead of first class on an airplane – sin. At least they are still able to have those experiences. With this budget, I won't be

able to afford to drive across the island to visit family.

This government is losing all respect of its people. We have no faith in any of the people making the decisions that are supposed to be in the best interest of people. The wealthy back the wealthy and have no regard for the rest of us. I watched the *CBC News* spot where the Premier and the Minister of Finance were defending their decisions and it was infuriating to hear them blatantly dodge direct questions. They obviously have no idea what it's like to be a working poor citizen. Take away the six-figure salaries and walk in our shoes and see if the same decisions are made.

You as our representatives need to put a stop to this. Stand up for your constituents. Show the Premier and Finance Minister you will not be bullied. Show the people you represent that you understand our concern. Show us that you will fight for what is right. Show us that we can trust you to do what is right for the people you serve. Don't give us a reason to vote you out the first chance we get.

Madam Chair, my time is up. I look forward to speaking further a little later this morning.

Thank you.

CHAIR (Dempster): Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member his time for speaking has expired.

The Chair recognizes the Member for Conception Bay South.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Madam Chair.

On an unrelated note, I also want to second what my colleague for Mount Pearl North said; I do not waste a lot of money on barbers. There's a few of us over here actually, we don't have a lot of bills. Except for a couple – except Conception Bay East – Bell Island he does require –

Anyway, Madam Chair, back to the main topic of our debate, I'll continue on. As I said earlier, I think it's important to read in some of these

emails. Constituents took time out to put in an email form and express their concerns and I think it's only right for us to share some of them with the House, to have them on record. We may not get them all entered, who knows, but I think it's important.

I'm writing in regard to the 2016 budget. My husband and I are your average working family. We both work, have two small children, 2½ and seven months old. We have a starter home, which we purchased eight years ago. In this market, we would not be able to purchase a new home with the current house prices. We have two small cars, student loans, a very high daycare bill. We are an average middle-class, working family trying to make a living and raise our children and give them the best we can afford.

We do not drink, smoke, party or waste money. We also do not have any extra once our bills are paid. Some months we have to use credit cards to make it work and hope we have enough to pay it off. With the new tax increase on our personal income tax, gas tax and debt reduction levy, our family will have to do without or we will be living on credit cards.

My husband and I are educated. We have worked very hard and have made sacrifices to create a life here. What the Premier and his government are doing to people like us is absolutely criminal. It's going to push families like us out of the province and make us lose what we have.

This makes me so angry that they can just take and take until there's nothing left. There has to be something that can be done. Families should not have to make a decision between food or a warm house while this government takes and takes. I hope they understand what they are doing to families.

As I said earlier about some of these emails, that's verbatim what was written. A lot of these are very heartfelt, Madam Chair.

I'll read another now: I'm sure you get lots of these emails and phone calls since the budget came out – which is true. I've always been the worrying type but this new budget is making me fret. Although we may be deemed middle class,

I assure you we are barely in this title. We are a paycheque to paycheque family.

I am heading back to work next month from my maternity leave for my second child, facing two daycare bills. I also work in a daycare. So after spending money to go to school for over two years for my diploma in early childhood, the pay will barely cover my child care now. I am debating if it's worth going back for now. It's very stressful to think about it.

My husband now faces the possibility of a layoff anytime and no luck in finding other work to cover our mortgage or other necessities. I must also mention my husband is a diabetic on insulin. He has a little bit of coverage at work but when and if a layoff happens, our worry increases due to the high cost of supplies to keep him alive. So this new budget is looking like it may be better off for lots of the province to give up and turn towards Income Support. I wonder how government will manage this.

I hope – my name – that you will work diligently against the unrealistic actions of this government that seems set on driving Newfoundlanders from the province with this outrageous levy and increases in taxation that will only serve to increase the hardship to poor and middle-income families here.

I am a retired civil servant who worked through some very hard times, but I have never seen anything like this. While I recognize we may have difficult times, I do not feel that the actions of government are realistic. It seems to me they do not know what to do.

It's imperative that you and other Member of the Opposition try to bring some sanity to what appears to be insane decision making by this government. I thank you for your efforts on behalf of the residents of CBS and all Newfoundland.

Madam Chair, as you can see by these emails – I will read some more – they are very, I guess to the point is a nice way of putting it. Most people are writing these straight from – I call it raw, because when I read them they're not filtered. They're straight from how they really, genuinely feel.

As we all know, when we write an email sometimes we tinker with it and make it fit or make it sound great. I don't know if Members opposite experience it, but most of the emails I've gotten, someone just sat there and they started writing. It's almost like they spilled every feeling they had at that moment and hit send. Some of these emails I've read – like I say, we all have lots of them – they hit a chord in you when you read them.

There's one in my pile somewhere, and I remember it stuck with me out of all the emails. The lady stated how she was crying as she wrote the email. Personally, regardless of what the topic was when I read it, it did hit that nerve with you. She was so personal to say that. I had no doubt that what she was saying was actually true, and that's a sad statement, Madam Chair.

As our MHA, we would like to inform you of the complete horror of what is contained in this so-called budget. It is an attack on seniors, students, middle-class families and the poor. It affects every aspect of our lives. They knew before they got elected that the financial situation in our province was not great and we are all sick of hearing the blame game.

As you know, all promises that were made were just that, promises. The Premier said himself: if you can't listen you can't lead. The levy tax is another kick in the head. We usually do not complain; however, we are furious about the way we are being treated.

We may end up losing our young people to other provinces, as well as our seniors, looking for a better life. We honestly believe that both the Premier and the Minister of Finance are –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. PETTEN: The Members are getting idle now at this hour of the morning. I'm losing track of my emails.

Another email, Madam Chair: I live in Kelligrews. As my MHA, I'm looking for you to be a voice of the people who put you in the position you have. The budget is brutal and it is affecting middle- and lower-income families and will devastate seniors. As a father of two school-age children, myself and my wife work hard to

provide as much as possible for them. Please vote against this budget and show you are listening to the people.

Well, that answer is I did vote against the budget, Madam Chair, and I actually was listening to the people. That I can tell you.

As a concerned, young, middle-class adult living in your district, I urge you and fellow Members to do all you can to overturn this ludicrous budget. For the health and well-being of people in our province, this cannot be allowed to stand.

As we know – that was an April 19 email – the budget has passed in the main motion. As we debate the levy here tonight we still feel like we voted against the main motion and we're still opposed to this levy. It's the reason we're here through the night to protest, I guess. At the end of the day, it will be what it will be. We're standing with the people that are crying out for us to speak up for them. It's what we're doing here now, and we've done so for the last several months, Madam Chair. I guess we'll continue to do so until the House does adjourn.

I would like to add my voice to the outrage expressed by all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians on the recent budget. It is a budget put directly on the backs of its people, affecting each and every one of us. When it comes time to vote for enforcement of the budget, please keep us in mind and vote no. Thank you for your time.

Again, that was another promise I kept, Madam Chair.

Another one I'll read: You had the support of my wife and I on election day. I'm asking you to keep us, and families like mine, in mind when it comes time for the budget to pass through the House of Assembly. This budget will absolutely destroy what remains of our economy and place too much burden on the lower- and middle-class while allowing those of greater fortune to skip by unscathed.

As we know, the levy has made adjustments to that. In my last minute – when you look at the schedule, the table for the levy, someone making \$700,000 got to pay \$1,800, someone making \$100,000 got to pay \$700. I'm not bad with

numbers – someone making \$50,000 or \$51,000 pays \$100, someone at \$100,000 pays \$700, and someone at \$700,000 pays \$1,800.

Someone across the way is saying, yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm not sure what math course they did, but the course I did I don't think that really adds up. Where I come from that don't really add up as being fair. Not much of this levy actually is fair, Madam Chair.

I'll get another chance to speak again soon.

Thank you.

CHAIR (Dempster): Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member his time for speaking has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island.

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Madam Chair.

It is indeed an honour to stand again for the next 10 minutes and talk about the levy bill and the impact it's having on our citizens, particularly those related to my district and the portfolios that I'm responsible for as the critic.

I do want to note and thank the Minister of Environment who went to my district, and particularly to Beachy Cove Elementary. There are some real keen students down there, and a great administration and great teachers. No doubt, he got to see first-hand a school and its operations, but particularly the overcrowding. You see the challenges we have down there in a facility of that magnitude and a growing community, but we have rectified that.

We're only six months away from having those issues out of the way. So you'll even see more advancements around environment when you get to the junior high school, because what we managed to do – while it was a delay, and what I'm trying to implore to the Minister of Education, is sometimes it's better to delay

something to get a better result because it can be better thought out.

What we did with the new school we're building, the 32-classroom school, we found a parcel of land that environmentally works around the environment itself, the river itself. We worked with the town. Instead of a river being full and coming under a parking lot, we've built the school around it. We put it right in an area where it's next to all the playground area. It's all around a naturally environmental setting. It's protected by a wilderness area. Part of what we want to do and part of what the whole process was around was being able to do environmental teaching. So you have everything right at your fingertips.

It cost a few extra dollars and it took a little bit longer to be able to put the proper development and design so that it didn't do a hindrance to that area we had there. We had a wetlands area. We managed to do that. No doubt, the students will be the benefactors of that and so will the environment. I'm glad we managed to be able to do that.

That was through inclusion. The community council itself, the town council, the school council, the school district, the Department of Environment were involved at the time, the Department of Education and the Department of Transportation and Works. So we've done a lot of important things around enhancing education and ensuring that it is more beneficial down the road and using all the other amenities that we may have in the community to move things forward.

I'm glad you got a chance to experience that. No doubt, if you're still the minister this time next year when we open the school, maybe the Minister of Education will invite you along to come down and see what a great facility we'll have there and how it can be inductive to environmental learning also. I'm hoping I'll be invited also. No doubt, I will be there. Invited or not, no doubt I will be there. I look forward to it. Then I'll give you a good tour of the school that the community built.

One time you were one of the representatives for that area. Now you'll get to see the fruits of other people's labour and I think you'll be

impressed also. We'll have an opportunity to look at that in the near future.

I also want to read – as we've been doing – the concerns of parents and students from our different educational institutions, but particularly my own district here. This is addressed to the Premier: I'm a very concerned parent. I know the province is facing difficult times but if you can't maintain the educational services in place already than why would you expand? I'm a homeowner; I have a budget. If I can't maintain my existing lifestyle, I don't renovate my house. I wouldn't move one child to a smaller room and then build a new wing for another child. That would be favoritism.

Reducing Intensive Core French, increasing classroom cap sizes, multi-grade classrooms, you are punishing the older kids to give advantages to the kindergarten kids. I'm not against full-day kindergarten in principle. I'm from Nova Scotia. I had full-day kindergarten in the 1970s, but I'm absolutely 100 per cent against bringing it in during this economic climate and on the backs of my nine-year-old son.

I have a chemical engineering degree and a math degree. I am unemployed. My husband works with an oil company and is in danger of losing his job every day. The levy and increased taxes are bad enough. We can't afford an extra \$3,000 to \$5,000 per year. A hit to the education of my children may just be the last straw. I don't want to leave Newfoundland, but it's looking impossible to stay. Please don't rob Peter to pay Paul. I look forward to a response.

The lady gave her number and asked that somebody would respond to her. She has since emailed me and said, obviously, nobody has responded to even acknowledge that this existed.

It's unfortunate that you have citizens reaching out with legitimate concerns, people who understand exactly what the challenges are and acknowledge that. They're just asking for at least the opportunity to express their concerns or have explained exactly why this is the route that's being taken when everybody else is outlining that this is not the best approach.

This is not going to be in the best interest of our students. It's particularly going to be a hardship on our educators, our administrators, our students, no doubt, but even the parents. Parents are going to be feeling the stress of the changes that we are doing in our education system. That becomes a real challenge there. I think we have a responsibility to find a better way to impose our education system. That becomes the challenge.

I also want to read another letter that comes from a student at the school in my district. My name is Ava, and I'm a fifth grade student at Beachy Cove Elementary in Portugal Cove. I'm writing to you today due to the budget cuts in our education this year. I signed up for Intensive Core French for sixth grade but only 23 children are allowed to participate in the program because of the budget cuts. Fifty-two children signed up today.

I received my rejection letter for the program. Next year I will have to be in grade five/six split English class. The school didn't look over my academic records to decide my place. They drew names. My future came down to a lottery, thanks to these budget cuts, and so has the future of others. Twenty-eight other children from the fifth grade of Beachy Cove Elementary went home today with a rejection letter weighing down their backpacks. Some of my friends are part of that 28.

As a young Canadian, I believe all children are entitled to a good education and these cuts are preventing me from learning an official language. On top of that, next year many other students will be challenged due to the fact that the two grades will be combined.

We know what's coming, split classes and fewer impacts on a lot of children going into the sixth grade. I know there isn't a lot of money to go around but this is impacting the future of Newfoundland and Labrador's future of Canada. This is not the way I like to think of my home. Someone needs to do something. These cuts are affecting my future and the future of others. Please reconsider how you are spending the money. Signed, Ava.

Here's a young student who herself has enough of an understanding to see the impact this is

going to have on her education, her friends' education, and no doubt her future siblings education. She obviously understands the impact it's having on the administration and teachers, as she outlines there what's happening in their system. She now also understands she's going to have other challenges, or she's not going to be able to excel because she's going to be in a split, blended class which again there is going to be some challenges around how she promotes her own education and moves things forward.

So as we look at where we are from an education point of view, we continuously look at how regressive we're becoming. When you have ten-year-olds telling the Minister of Education and the Liberal government they're regressive, they have no concept of how we promote our community and our education system and our children, how they give no hope to anybody in our society, then we have a real problem here, and we have a real problem here.

The Minister of Environment was down there today. There is no doubt this young girl was in that school. I would think if she had the opportunity she would have asked the question: Why would you jeopardize the quality of education that we've become accustomed to, that we've investing into for years and years to address that?

I do welcome the Minister of Education to get up and talk about how blended classrooms are the best thing since sliced bread; how increasing cap sizes works for everybody; how preventing people from being able to do Intensive Core French is a positive for our education system; how putting kids in overcrowded schools is a positive thing; how libraries is a good thing for literacy.

How, at the end of the day, when we cut programs and services, when we eliminate things that existed in the past, when we overburden administrators, teachers, when we don't train teachers in a field they're not familiar with, when we cancel schools that were to move forward, particularly in areas that have heavy growth, when we're guaranteeing that bus systems are going to be disruptive for parents, for children, for the administrators, we're going to put people at risk.

When we look at our overall objective here, it is to improve the quality of our education. That's how he touts it, as this is going to improve the quality of education, but every piece of documentation, every article ever written, every professional in the field, every parent, even now students are weighing in, even students can see the error of their ways here.

The minister stands steadfast, this is the right thing to do – either it's about total money and it's just about a cut and the students are going to be one of the sacrifice things. Well, he actually believes that what's being proposed here is going to be in the best interest of our education system.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll get a chance to speak again before the day is out.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Cape St. Francis.

MR. K. PARSONS: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

It's a pleasure to get up again tonight and talk again about the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis and represent the people of Cape St. Francis. I hope the Minister of AES will let me get my statement in now so he doesn't be heckling me during the 10 minutes that I do have.

AN HON. MEMBER: He's mellowed out.

MR. K. PARSONS: He's mellowed out a little bit there now.

I just want to talk a little bit – the last time up I spoke about education. I'm going to finish off this time on education. I want to go back to earlier tonight. It's 5:30 now in the morning, there are a lot of people getting up and I guess they will be tuning in soon. So maybe we'll see some of the hon. Members finally get on their feet and say a few words about this budget. I would imagine in the next hour or so we'll probably see them up then.

I really want talk about seniors. Seniors have benefited great, done all right over the last number of years. In my district, I'm going to give a couple of examples of how we help

seniors. The Home Repair Program, I just want to talk a little bit about the Home Repair Program. It's a great program that is done through Newfoundland and Labrador Housing.

Our seniors, Madam Chair, never really look for anything. They're very content and they are well into making sure somebody else always gets something. You'll never hear them demand, demand, demand, but the Home Repair Program is a program that can help seniors stay in their home.

Over the last number of years, since I got involved in politics – I'm not sure if it was there beforehand or whatever, but since I got involved I've taken it on myself to make sure there were applications available to seniors groups. So when I went down to the 50plus – and it's not only seniors who can avail of the Home Repair Program. Anyone on low income can really, but it always seems like it's our seniors.

I'll tell you a couple of stories now. I went into a ladies house and she was telling me about her roof being leaky. No, no, she said, I wouldn't want to – I'll get that fixed down the road. I explained it to her and I brought the application down. We got the application. She applied, and within a short period of time the inspector came down. Sure enough, she got her roof fixed. Afterwards I went down and saw her, she couldn't believe me. She said I couldn't believe there are programs in government that can help seniors out like this and helped me.

Here's a lady who was in her 80s, in the traditional Newfoundland home, we would say, and here with a leaky roof. She was willing to put up with that, basically, and probably find some way in order to get it fixed. Seniors are typical. Seniors would rather give to their grandchildren, rather give to children than they would to invest in themselves. They're always thinking about other people.

Only last year I went down, there was a gentleman – two or three times I went to his house. He's a really nice man. Again, no, no, that's okay Kevin, don't worry about it. I brought the application down one day and we filled it out. To tell you how he was so delighted with being able to get a door – the door that he

had in the side of his house, in the nighttime he used to put tape around it to keep the draft out.

Anyway, we went and got the program, and the good people from Eastern Siding – I will give them a good boost because they were really good to him – came down and put in a door. They put siding on the front of his house and put a new window in the front of his house. Just to know how appreciative he was, it was unbelievable. There are programs that are in government that are helping seniors.

The other one that really, when I talk about seniors now – there were a couple of small grants we used to get, and I'm not sure if they're available now or not, but they were for seniors going on – like your 50plus clubs. They go on an outing to –

AN HON. MEMBER: Oh, oh!

MR. K. PARSONS: They're still there, that's good. I'm very glad they're still there. That's a great program you know, because what happens in the 50plus clubs, they go on their outings and stuff like that. Anytime we can make our seniors active, the seniors are going to be healthier. Healthier seniors and more active seniors is a healthier senior.

You wouldn't believe the small grants like – I know the 50Plus Club in Torbay went and rented a bus. They went to Ferryland and went up and had a picnic up by the Colony of Avalon there. You know, what a great day. It may have been \$1,000 or whatever it was, but that was a great investment because it got them out. That's what we have to do. Those are the little things we do to help our seniors. Those are great grants.

The other one I want to talk a little bit about is the REEP grant. That's for energy efficiency. What it is, it's about \$3,000 and they go down and they check in the home. There's a machine they put in the home and they'll tell you where you're losing the draft in the house. It can be a door that needs to be replaced. Most times it's due to – in a lot of the older homes you'll find that they don't have any insulation in them. For \$3,000 you can put a lot of insulation in a person's home.

The Home Repair Program and the REEP really benefits seniors because what it will do – we want to make sure, and seniors want to make sure they can live in their homes as long as they can. Anytime we can do these investments, whether it's the REEP or the Home Repair Program, those are great investments for our seniors. There are a lot of different things, but those are the good things.

Now, I'm going to get into the things that this budget is doing to seniors. Most seniors live in their own homes. They do drive, but they're all on fixed incomes. If you go down to a person who's on a fixed income, they can basically take their cheque that week and sit down and tell you where every nickel is going to. I know you all have people in your districts the same way. They look at their cheque and they can tell you.

Now, coming up they have to pay 15 per cent on the insurance on their cars. I spoke to a gentleman only a couple of weeks ago, a neighbour of mine down in Flatrock. I was talking to him, and he said, Kevin, when is that going to come into effect that I'm going to have – because he knows this month, this is what his insurance bill is. Most people do it over 10 months and they know. So that bill is going to go up 15 per cent.

He wanted to know: Where am I going to get that extra money to pay for those bills? Now, his home insurance. Home insurance is going up 15 per cent. Those are all worries for seniors. They're huge worries for seniors.

Not only that, if you look at what happened last week with the price of gas. Now to put gas in the car – car insurance has gone up, home insurance has gone up, and the gas has gone up. Where are they going to get the money? These are people on fixed income. They are looking and saying, listen, this is a little bit too much for me.

That's what's happening with this budget. You're not looking at the effect you have on people who really, really need our help. Our seniors paid their price in Newfoundland and Labrador. They paid the price for all of us. They've been there. They've built this economy. They built our province. What reward do they get? The reward they get is when they go up to the drug store and it was something that was

prescribed and got paid for here, and then they find out they have to pay \$4 or \$5, \$6 or \$7 now for something that was covered before and not covered again.

When you speak to people they had trust, a lot of them had trust. The trust they had, they heard a stronger tomorrow. They heard all the promises – no HST, they heard all the promises. They heard the promises from the government and what do they get? Nothing but broken promises, and it continues day after day after day.

Our seniors – we brought in a couple of years ago the dental plan for dentures. The government on the other side lobbied very, very hard. What it was you could either get the top set or the lower set. I heard Members across the way saying how their dignity – no dignity at all. What did they do to seniors with this program? They eliminated the whole program. They eliminated it. So there's no dental program now at all for seniors.

I congratulated the Members opposite because they did lobby so hard. Then, what happened in this budget? They decided to cut it. They solved the problem with the dentures because they just eliminated it altogether. Again, it's another attack on our seniors.

If you go back to your districts and you go and you talk to people, ask them how they're going to do it. They'll ask you: How do you think we're going to do this? How are we going to get by? Where are we going to get the extra money that you're asking us for? We're on fixed incomes.

CHAIR (Warr): Order, please!

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

CHAIR: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It certainly is a pleasure to rise again at 5:38 a.m. and continue on with the debate on Bill 14,

An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act. Of course that's the levy bill.

We've been at this for quite some time. I suspect that this time tomorrow we'll still be here. I just have a feeling. I could be wrong, but I just have a feeling.

Mr. Chair, it is great to speak again. I'm kind of sad in a way that we are speaking about this because I would have hoped the budget would have been something that was more palatable to the people. If it had been, there would be no need of engaging in a filibuster.

I can tell you, Mr. Chair, in all my time, either being involved in politics or following politics, I have to say I've never seen the type of – what's the word – outrage, concern, engagement by the public that I've seen with this particular budget. I know all Members are seeing it. I know they're all hearing it. The emails that are being read here overnight and this morning, and will continue to be read I'm sure, are only a small sample of the emails that have been received.

I can tell you from the perspective of social media, whether it be Facebook or Twitter or whatever, and we can talk all we want and sometimes joke about Twitter and these things, but at the end of the day there are an awful lot of people who are engaged in that medium, following this debate and commenting on this debate and sending private messages to Members about issues they have and so on. That's very real.

I've never seen the amount of feedback that I've seen in the last few days. I think it's fair to say that people are upset. Not just because of all the emails we know everybody is getting, but we're also seeing demonstrations. We're seeing demonstrations over education. We're seeing demonstrations by the unions. We're seeing demonstrations by ordinary citizens. We're seeing silent protests. We're seeing people up in the galleries. We're seeing calls for resignations. We're seeing posters, petitions.

I don't know what number is on that petition, but the last I heard it was like 26,000 people calling for resignations. It's probably higher now, I don't know. Whatever it is, I've never seen anything like this before. I really haven't.

I know it's fine to sort of flip it off and say: Ah, there's nothing to that, whatever. I'll be honest, my thought, originally when I started seeing some of the feedback coming in and whatever, I was thinking that's just the union people who are sort of stirring this up because they have concerns or whatever. Then it was like okay, well maybe it's that. Maybe it's this group or that lobby group or what have you, but I can tell you it's not.

We can bury our head in the sand and pretend this is not happening but I'm telling you, and everybody knows it, deep down you know it's true. I'm talking to people, certainly in my district, people who have traditionally been Progressive Conservative, people who are traditionally NDP and people who are traditionally Liberal, and I'm getting the same feedback.

As a matter of fact, I've run into a number of what I would associate as staunch Liberal people. I've gone into a store or whatever and said: oh, I'm going to get it this time. This person was a former candidate for the Liberal Party or this person was heavily involved with the campaign with the Liberal Party, I'm finally going to get that blast. When I approach them, or they come over and tap me on the shoulder and say: Paul b'y, you did the right thing. You did the right thing not supporting it. I can't afford it.

I'm not making it up. Now, that's not to say everybody is that way. There will always be people who will totally follow that brand no matter what. There's not a thing – you could do whatever you like, they're going to stay true to it no matter what, but I can tell you, there's an awful lot of people who I would consider in my community to be strong Liberal people traditionally, who are saying to me never again. That's what they're saying. I'm only going by what I'm hearing. I'm sure the Members are hearing the same thing, because I've also heard it from some people I would consider in that same boat from other districts that I've run into who have said the same thing.

I've heard the expression used over there, it is what it is. I guess it is what it is, but if you think for a second that the discontent, the anger and all that stuff, if you think for one second that those are hyper partisans from other parties or union

people – they're part of it, no doubt – I can tell you now it's the everyday person who is also just as concerned and just as upset. It's everybody. Really, is it any wonder, because in this budget there was nobody left untouched. There was literally nobody left untouched.

I'm sure there's a train of thought, oh well, this has happened before. We had the whole issue back in the '90s and the government took on the union and whatever. At the end of the day, they end up with a bigger majority in the next election than they had the one before and all of that. That's true, but you're not taking on the unions. This is like everybody. This is like every chick and child is being impacted by this.

I know that Members understand. I know deep down you know it's true. Anyway, that's your decision to make and I guess that'll be up to you to reconcile that with the people you represent. I'm not going to knock you for making the decision. You made the decision, good for you. I made a decision, everyone is making a decision, and it will be up to the people who elected us to decide whether they agree with the decision or not, but I can tell you, categorically, that I have never, ever seen anything like this, and it's not going away, that's the thing.

It's not going away because every time somebody goes to the gas pump it's a reminder. Every time when the insurance is up for renewal it's a reminder. When people go to register their vehicles it's a reminder. When they renew their licence it's a reminder. When they go to Butterpot Park it's a reminder. If they go to buy something it's 2 per cent on the thing, it's a reminder. When they go to do their income tax it's a reminder. It's a constant reminder over and over and over again.

People are not going to forget about it. I'm convinced they're not going to forget about it. It's not like there's some big megaproject on the horizon where you can say, well, next year or the year after there's this big pot of money that's coming and everything is going to be great. Unless there's something I'm missing, I don't see anything.

Yes, hopefully the price of oil goes up. I hope it does for everyone's sake, but beyond that there's no big revenue stream flowing in here in the

next couple of years that I can foresee. There really isn't. So it's going to be tough.

I think you're going to regret not listening to the people. I really believe you're going to regret not listening to the people. That's not saying you have to do everything, because we all know you can't do it all. We all know we're in tough times and everybody understands that, but there has to be a little bit of flexibility. There has to be some flexibility and some sober second thought. As I've said many times, it's not too late. It's still not too late. It's not too late to make some changes, and it's the people who put us here.

When I got into politics – and I'm like a lot of people here, I started out as a community volunteer. If you had to look at my high school yearbook, you'd never say I'd be a politician. It was the last thing on my mind. I never in a million years thought it would happen. I had no interest in it, quite frankly. I was a community volunteer and that led me to municipal council, and then I guess the rest is history.

One of the things I can remember from a friend of mine, who was pretty much a mentor of mine I guess politically, and that was former Speaker of the House, Harvey Hodder. Harvey always said to me when I got into politics: never forget those that brung ya. That's what he used to say: don't forget those who brung ya. Don't forget the people who brought you to the dance. That's what he used to say, and it's true. Because at the end of the day it's the people who put you here and it's the people who are going to take you out of here if they feel you're not listening to what they're saying, you're not being responsive to what they're saying.

I think there's an awful lot of people upset, an awful lot of people concerned. I think it would be in everyone's best interest if you listen to the people and make some reasonable changes.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

It's 5:48 a.m. and I'm happy to be able to stand up and speak to this bill, to talk about the levy.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, the Member for Cape St. Francis is happy that we're going to get up and filibuster now. He's asking us to do his job for him. Well, not a problem.

This is similar to the other filibusters that I've been a part of, and I'm glad to see the NDP really leading the charge here.

MR. KENT: (Inaudible) to tweet here.

MR. A. PARSONS: I say to the Member for Mount Pearl North, tweet away.

We're speaking to the levy, and a couple of points I want to make here is that I've sat and listened to the Members opposite talk over the last number of hours and a lot of them have taken to printing off emails and reading the emails. I will note that a lot of them are dated. You can tell by the reading of them. The words they say, they were clearly sent well before the changes were brought to this levy so people would forget that the levy has been changed substantially. There were a lot of changes made due to the great co-operation between our party and the federal government. You could tell there are obviously changes there, but that's no problem if they want to read emails; again, by all means.

What that reminded me of – actually, I had my computer here and I was looking through, and I was reading emails from *Budget 2013*. So it's funny, it's a tad ironic, hypercritical, whatever word you want to put on it, every Member on the other side, except for the Member for CBS – it's funny, because they're telling us you should read those emails but I don't seem to recall many emails being read back in *Budget 2013*. It was the same thing, we were getting emails – and including the Member for Mount Pearl Southlands, he was here. The same thing, he was on this side. So again, it goes both ways.

What I would say is it's fine to sit there now and read the emails and say you should be listening, but it's clear that's not something you did when you were over here. I read the emails about the

EAS offices, about the Adult Basic Education, about the cuts to the justice system. The same thing –

MR. KIRBY: The 160 teachers.

MR. A. PARSONS: – the 160 teachers that were cut by the PC government back in 2013. There were a number of things that were done in that budget. The complete loss of confidence by the civil service in that government. There were a number of things done here.

Obviously, they changed course because they did that in *Budget 2013*. We heard about it loud and clear. Then things obviously changed in 2014-2015 because they went back to the same spending patterns that have gotten us in the mess that we inherited here. There's no doubt about it, it has gotten us right back in the mess that we are in here.

I'm not going to bother to read those emails. I don't think they add to it, but I can see why the Members opposite like to refer to emails, by all means, but I think it would be proper to at least read the dates on the emails to show when they were sent because we are here debating Bill 14, which is the Deficit Reduction Levy. A temporary measure that's brought in to basically help raise revenue to cover off the cost of services and to help clean up the financial mess that the PCs placed this province in over 10 years of mismanagement, drunken sailor-like spending which was led by four of their premiers – I think it was four. I get the number confused sometimes.

AN HON. MEMBER: Four and a half.

MR. A. PARSONS: Four-and-a-half premiers.

I mentioned this earlier when I spoke; I want to talk about the Leader of the Official Opposition, the former PC premier. He got up and talked about how the current Premier wouldn't answer questions. We've asked questions, he wouldn't answer, talking about Muskrat Falls, talking about severance.

It's funny, because it wasn't that long ago, I can remember we were sat on the other side asking questions on a number of topics and the same thing. We couldn't get an answer.

That's funny because one of the things we asked about for a number of years – in fact, the last filibuster we had, real filibuster, was talking about one of those topics that is causing some of the issues we have here now is Muskrat Falls, which I think was actually voted on by at least some of the Members who have been speaking recently. The Member who just spoke was actually somebody who voted for Muskrat Falls.

It's funny because the previous administration did nothing to keep in check the debacle that has become, the situation that has become. It's been a huge expenditure of taxpayer funds to go in there. The fact is there were contracts signed. There was no oversight.

We do know that EY has done a report. In their report they come back and talk about the significant issues that are present in that operation right now. It's something that should have been noticed by the Members opposite, but it's either (a) they didn't notice it which is a concern, or (b) they did notice it and did nothing, because they couldn't. This was their project, one that was put through this House.

It is the same thing, I've sat on that side and we did a filibuster. I think I can remember one of the last things I said in that debate was, we're doing what we have to do. The same as the Members feel, this is what they have to do. This is part of the process. This is one of the legislative processes that you go through. One of the last things I said at that time was I hope I'm wrong. I hope that project, the one we filibustered, is as good as they say it is, because that's what we all want. It's the best thing for taxpayers. I hoped that was the case, but clearly we've seen significant issues with that.

One of the things we want to talk about, and they keep saying you should look at what you're doing. I think it's telling because a lot of these emails were actually written well before the budget vote, which was last week. We know the budget was passed. This is, I guess, an enabling piece of legislation.

During that vote, I think it was telling that one Member opposite, not a Member who has spoken recently – just so they're aware – but a Member opposite actually called out after the budget vote was done and said, there goes your

re-election. I thought to myself, that's why we're in the mess we are in. Because it's thinking like that, that causes problems.

I'm not saying that's just a problem with the previous administration. No doubt, there have been problems throughout our history. Again, that's not the thinking we need to employ in order to get us out of this mess. It's only easy to make the popular decision, the easy decision. It's a lot harder to make the tough decision, one that you know is not popular.

When somebody says that to me, you just lost your election. Well, if we wanted to make all the decisions that we thought were the most popular politically and going to guarantee re-election, that's not going to get us out of the situation we're in. I don't think any Member in this House disputes that we are in a serious financial situation, a debacle, a mess, a catastrophe, a crisis. We all see that. The numbers don't lie. The numbers they had, the numbers that we found out, and with all of the steps that have been taken we still have a significant, significant deficit – almost \$2 billion.

I don't think the Members opposite have argued that. I think they all agree, if you find yourself in a situation – they disagree as to what we're going to have to do to get out of it. I haven't quite heard many – I've heard a couple of suggestions I think, not many. I think I've heard some from some Members. I don't think I've heard absolutely anything from the Third Party on solutions or suggestions that might help us out of this situation.

AN HON. MEMBER: Alberta.

MR. A. PARSONS: Alberta. They keep referencing Alberta, which is just a completely different topic. In fact, we debated other pieces of legislation not associated with the budget last week. We talked about the Highway Traffic Act, and one thing they said was you need to spend more on resources. It's a similar thing. It's amazing.

There's a Member who was once famous for using that phrase money tree. I don't know who that Member was but he used to always call out to the Third Party saying money tree, money tree. I'm not going to say that, but the point he

was trying to make I think is we have a situation where you just can't go out and spend all that you want to spend. That's an unfortunate situation we have here. We have to be fiscally prudent. We had to make these decisions that are tough. There's been a significant increase in spending over the last number of years and that's something we have to figure out as we move forward.

I'm looking forward to continue to speak to this, to speak to the levy. I look forward to the Members continuing to have their debate and to read their emails. Again, we'll take every opportunity to respond to this, to continue to speak to this, and on decisions we had to make to put us back in the situation we need to be in going forward.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning once again.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. KENT: Yes, it is.

We are reading emails from people around the province. Some of them have come in over the past month, but I have dozens, literally dozens, Mr. Chair, that I've received in the last 24 hours. I put the call out yesterday afternoon to say if you have concerns you'd like brought to the floor of the House of Assembly in the days ahead, send them to us, email us, and we'll make sure they are read into the record. So that they're in Hansard, so they're on the broadcast, so that your concerns can be actually captured during the debate.

There are not a lot of debates in the House of Assembly where you can do that to a large degree because you get so much time in second reading, and then you get into the Committee stage where you are debating specific clauses; but, because of the nature of the debate we're having here it is pretty wide-ranging, and there

is an opportunity for us to talk about whatever issues we want to bring forward.

Yes, people initially were really, really upset about the levy. That seemed to be the focal point post-budget, but that has evolved. People are really upset about the increases in gasoline prices. People are really upset about the closure of 54 libraries. People are really upset about devastating cuts to our K-12 school system.

I think it's good news there have been some changes made to the levy. That will mean there's another segment of our population that will not be impacted by it, but some of the folks who already pay a disproportionate share of taxes will now pay more. Some of them would not be classified as extremely wealthy people. The definition of middle class has definitely evolved as inflation has occurred and as our labour market has evolved as well. All of that needs to be acknowledged as well. We will continue to bring forward concerns from those who want their concerns brought into this debate.

In the time I have now at exactly 6 a.m., I'd like to share a few more thoughts, shorter messages that I've received from a number of people. Some of these thoughts have been shared with just me, as one MHA. Some have been shared with multiple MHAs. There are many, many messages we've received that we're reading this morning that probably sound familiar to Members opposite, or they should, because they've received them as well.

Here's one. When questioned about the feasibility of a tunnel and the exorbitant cost for a fixed link, the Premier stated: Information is needed to help long-term planning. Perhaps someone will be kind enough to give this gentleman a name of a good optometrist for his short-sighted affliction.

This ad hoc circus is making Newfoundland and Labrador a mockery in how not to govern. I would suggest this current regime step down and together they can spend time with the residents of this province and understand the reality of real time and the hardship being imposed on them.

The PC party has vision, a financial plan and sound judgement. I can only hope the Premier

and his people step down from their destructive policies and the responsible PC party step in.

Now, I know there are lots of people in the province who still are unhappy with the PC party. There are people who felt it was time for us to move on and give somebody else a chance to govern, but there are a lot of people who are also now reflecting on their decision back in the fall and regretting that decision.

We weren't perfect. There are things that perhaps we could have done differently, but, again, as I said earlier in this debate, despite this devastating budget, the province overall is still in far better shape than it was a decade ago. There is still lots of work to do. There are still many difficult decisions we need to face in the months and years ahead, but we had a plan. We were committed to that plan, and we were honest about that plan. We didn't make a whole bunch of election promises we had no intention of keeping, which is one of the things I think people are most upset about.

As I mentioned earlier, the closure of libraries is something that people are really upset about. Someone shared with me a recent article from *The Globe and Mail*. In the few minutes I have at this point, I'd like to share some thoughts. Hopefully, I'll get through the full thing.

"Get thee to a library: It's more important than ever." It's an article, an opinion piece by Jessica Riddell. "In the wake of the provincial government's decision to close almost half the public libraries in Newfoundland and Labrador, politicians have offered up a number of justifications. The most prevalent – and specious – argument is that technology has rendered libraries obsolete, and that libraries are now relics of the predigital age.

"This couldn't be further from the truth.

"Libraries are not static repositories of physical books. Rather, they are knowledge hubs where people of all ages can seek out opportunities, collaborate, create, and learn. When we think about libraries, we must extend our perception beyond the limitations of bricks and mortar, books and periodicals, and understand libraries as public spaces devoted to knowledge creation in its many forms. Public libraries uphold values

of inclusivity, social and cultural literacy, and equal access to knowledge – all key values of a vibrant and thriving democracy. When we close our libraries, we threaten to unravel the very fabric that binds members of our communities together.

"In this digital age it is even more important to invest in libraries as spaces where we encounter, explore, and experiment with ideas, whether these ideas are found in the pages of books or are circulated by digital content platforms and new technologies. As a university professor, I have yet to find a technology that can replicate – much less supersede – the powerful learning that occurs when my students and I encounter complex ideas together in safe, supportive, and curiosity-driven environments.

"If you've been to a public library recently, chances are you've seen how vibrant and dynamic these public spaces are. You may have stopped in for free Wi-Fi and stayed for an art exhibition. You may have browsed the new releases while waiting for a public lecture to start. You may have signed up for a book club and discovered the espresso at the library café is unparalleled. If you are a regular user of a public library, you know that the programming offers almost endless learning opportunities for every age and stage, from toddlers to seniors.

"In the past 15 years, many educational institutions (especially in higher education) have invested in their libraries; some have even renamed their libraries as 'learning commons.' The new name is designed to emphasize how these public learning spaces represent the true sense of a 'commons' – that is, a space accessible to all members of a community who have responsibility for and investment in a shared vision of learning. Librarians and library staff at my university are key collaborators in this vision: they are not guardians of books but rather facilitators, curators, community event organizers, archivists, researchers, educators, and mentors. Moreover, they teach the next generation about digital literacy, a core competency of global citizenship.

"Steven Johnson, in *Where Good Ideas Come From: The Natural History of Innovation*, traces the history of innovation and argues that creating fertile environments facilitates 'collisions of

creativity' where people from diverse backgrounds 'converge in some shared physical or intellectual space.' Although Mr. Johnson identifies 18th-century coffee houses, 19th-century salons, and even a 1970s garage where Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak famously founded Apple as sites of these collisions, he could easily have been describing the public libraries of the 21st century.

"Libraries are not a luxury to be cut when there is an economic downturn." Let me repeat that line again. "Libraries are not a luxury to be cut when there is an economic downturn. Instead, we should be investing in libraries and learning commons as key social institutions that connect members of our communities and provide opportunities for creative collisions.

"Now picture a library. What do you see? If the image in your mind includes rows upon rows of books, people reading quietly, and a stern librarian shushing unwitting patrons who crackle a candy wrapper, you need to get thee to a public library. And while you are there, hug a librarian."

So that's an interesting perspective on the importance of libraries and the evolving role of libraries. While much has changed, much remains the same as it did decades, if not centuries ago.

I see my time is up, Mr. Chair. I look forward to speaking again as debate continues.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's a pleasure to get up and speak to this legislation once again. I have to say, it's certainly rather depressing listening to the doom and gloom from the Members opposite. I have to say, if I wasn't an optimistic kind of a fellow, I'd swear the whole roof and the sky and everything above that was about to cave right down into us because I don't know how many

words have been used here to describe the coming apocalypse that's somehow going to be hastened by the budget that passed last week, that has already passed.

Members have been talking about how it's destroying the economy; talking about that prior to any of the changes even taking effect, which makes no sense to me but as long as it makes sense to them that's fine with me. Some of the other stuff that makes absolutely no sense to me, the Members basically have said don't cut anything. They've been up reading messages they have, that they are more or less selling here on the floor of the House of Assembly as what we ought to be doing.

They basically have said throughout the morning, don't cut anything except for full-day kindergarten, that's \$13.3 million annualized; the feasibility study for the tunnel, the fixed-link to Labrador, \$750,000, cut that; and cut the seniors' advocate position, which they've said is a luxury. So that gets us to a grand total of \$14.4 million. They said don't cut anything except for that. I haven't heard anything else.

I don't know if they want the schools cut that are being built in their own districts. Because, interestingly enough, they're all being built in PC districts – the \$14.4 million. Then on top of that, they basically said don't cut adult dental, don't cut this drug thing, don't cut something else, don't cut and don't cut. So they don't want anything else cut. They just want us to cut full-day kindergarten for \$13.3 million, \$750,000 for the fixed-link feasibility, and the seniors' advocate. Just cut those things for a grand total of about \$14.5 million, and then no other solutions at all.

In fact, they got up and said basically don't raise taxes at all, except somehow, mysteriously they would increase taxes but they're not really coming out and saying exactly how that's going to happen. So pardon me for being confused but that was about the most convoluted few hours I think I've ever spent in the House of Assembly in the four-and-a-half years that I've been here – that I've been fortunate enough to be here.

Interestingly enough, the Leader of the Opposition said a few hours ago, responding to just the latest controversy involving their pet

Crown corporation Nalcor, he said details are important. Of course, history is also vitally important.

I started making a list of all the things where details are important. One of them, it relates to the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island who, again, was up decrying overcrowding at Beachy Cove Elementary, at the same time talking about how he was going to welcome everybody down to witness his great work once the new school was built down there. That's the first time I've ever heard that the one-year delay in building the new middle school that's been promised for Portugal Cove-St. Philip's was a strategic plan somehow associated with an environmental program or a piece of land that's somewhere approximate to a bunch of woods or something where they're going to have an environmental program. I never, ever heard of that before. That's new information to me.

What I do know is that just over a year ago I attended a public meeting out in Portugal Cove-St. Philip's where that Member guaranteed the school community that the school would be ready for September 2016. Now, that's this September. It's very well-known now that it's not going to be ready. It's the first time I've ever heard that was planned, that was going to be delayed strategically because of an environmental program they're planning.

The other thing was they were saying today why is it that we were repaying funds to the federal government for equalization, the repayment debt. Why are we repaying that when we're in the process of negotiating with the federal government on getting some funds back on that to reduce the temporary Deficit Reduction Levy, which is actually the bill we're debating here?

Well, details and history are important. Why did the Minister of Transportation and Works at the time, the same Member, the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island, why did he purchase Romanian ferries to the tune of tens of millions of dollars? One that has barely worked and is tied up most of the time inconveniencing people who were sold a bill of goods on this ferry. Why did he do that before he was clear that we wouldn't have to pay tens of millions of

dollars in tariff penalties on that? Why is that? Details and history are important.

Likewise, going into the provincial election campaign last year, the Premier – he was Leader of the Opposition at the time – wrote to the premier of the day, the current Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Topsail – Paradise, he asked him in September what the fiscal update was. We traditionally would get a fiscal update in the fall. There was nothing. No details at all about the fiscal situation. He just chose not to share that information.

We based our election platform on the same information they based theirs on, but somehow we were supposed to revise, despite the fact they used the same information as we did. Because we were mysteriously supposed to know what they already knew, which is the mess they had created was a far bigger mess than what we'd been led to believe.

There's a list of, I don't know how many other different things, where details are important and history is equally important. I'll list them off: the Abitibi mill, expropriating that here in the House of Assembly without all of the information and incurring millions of dollars by basically expropriating a hazardous waste dump.

Humber Valley Paving; still no details, Mr. Chair, on what went on there, some-\$19 million in bonds basically released to the guy who was going to be – well, he was leader for a few weeks or something of the PC Party of Newfoundland and Labrador, Frank Coleman. Releasing Humber Valley Paving from those legal obligations, from those financial obligations and no one ever knew anything. The truth of that has really not been known to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to this day. So details are important.

What about the fisheries fund? What about the CEDA agreement they said they had signed? There was no paper ever signed, no signatures on paper. They even went out and had a tea party here in the lobby of the Confederation Building. That wasn't for free. They had a tea party out here. They had a big celebration. Nobody was there from the federal government, mind you, nobody there to corroborate anything they were saying; but, no, the deal was signed.

That's never materialized to this day and we've never seen any details on that.

One of the filibusters we had on Bill 29 here, which was rammed through the House of Assembly, that was the best – according to the Members opposite who were over here at the time. It was the best piece of legislation, even though it was going to put us behind Third World countries. It was the greatest thing that was ever going to happen. Then, once the public backlash hit, they spent a million dollars trying to unwind themselves out of the sort of hoops they jumped through and the backflips.

AN HON. MEMBER: Bring back Felix.

MR. KIRBY: Felix – no, don't bring back Felix.

They spent a million dollars trying to get themselves out of the pretzel they'd twisted themselves into to convince the people of the province that this was a good direction to go into.

I'll get up in a minute and just do my full 10 minutes on Muskrat Falls because the Member for Cape St. Francis says he's concerned about seniors. Well, wait until they turn the juice on from Muskrat Falls. The bill of goods you sold seniors in this province as the least-cost option, which is going to break seniors in this province. When that happens, that'll be on your head for selling them that bill of goods.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's interesting to follow that commentary. We were waiting all night for them to come to life, but I guess now they feel like people are paying attention again so they're going to get up and have their two cents' worth.

AN HON. MEMBER: It's true, yes. It's very true.

MR. PETTEN: It's true. Go back and look at Hansard.

MR. KIRBY: A lot of mumbling.

MR. PETTEN: Yes, a lot of mumbling. That's right, Minister of Education.

You stand up and you say your budget is gloom and doom. I beg to differ on that. We're reading the emails from constituents. So maybe you should stand up again and tell everyone in the province they're gloom and doom. No, your budget is gloom and doom. These are concerns from real people.

Yes. Do you know what? They are gloom and doom, Minister, because they've had to swallow what you've put out to the people since April 14. The gall to stand up there and lecture us because we're reading emails from people. That's convoluted and you've never listened to something. The gall of you to stand in this House and to get on like that, you should be ashamed of yourself.

Then on top of that, every school person in the province is totally irate and you won't listen to any of their concerns. We've presented petitions – unbelievable.

I'm going to read some more emails, seeing it's so convoluted. I wanted to also point out something else.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. PETTEN: No, it galls me, I got to be honest.

The Opposition House Leader – on a calmer note – he mentioned about the dates. I point out to him, he is correct. Those people still have those same concerns. They sent the emails out. They were at a prior date. I acknowledge some of this levy stuff has made changes, but the overall context of their emails is still very valid because they have concerns about the budget in its entirety.

The levy, as I always say, is part of the bigger picture. So the budget is still their concerns. As we read these emails you see it. It's not all about the levy. It's all about the budget as a whole.

I am a resident of Conception Bay South and I'm writing for your help. I'm not strongly affiliated with any political party nor have I taken a strong position on who is to blame for the current fiscal situation our province is in. However, with Thursday's budget, I am fearful and anxious that the terms affect me in my professional and personal life beyond what I could have imagined.

I am an ICF teacher. I'm a single mother of two who shares equal custody of her children. This budget will see the elimination of ICF teachers, and with my low seniority it's a good possibility I will be affected. I'm unsure exactly how, but in any case it would be devastation. Losing my income would mean I cannot support my children.

If I'm offered relocation, I would have to choose between a messy court process to fight to take my children with me from their father, to leave them with their father and give up custody, or quit my career. Can you understand how devastating these choices are? The extra expenses will make caring for my children hard enough. I'm already struggling to make ends meet as a single parent. I'm afraid the extra expense will lead to financial ruin.

Furthermore, as a teacher, the budget is equally devastating. I have children in my classroom that cannot get the attention and help they need because of the lack of resources with the inclusion model as it is. Putting more students in one room without adding any human resources they require will make my daily career impossible. How can I help them succeed? I love these children. I want them to have everything they need so they can do their best. I am spread thin as it is.

I have spent 20 minutes sitting on the floor with a child who was having an anxiety attack because the guidance counsellor was in a very important meeting. I routinely stay up late at home to consider ways to help students who do not qualify for support or are too weak to master the curriculum outcomes on their own. This simply can't continue. As my MHA, I'm asking you to fight for me and my sons and my students. Please do not let this budget pass.

So I guess, Minister of Education, that's convoluted too. I'll read another convoluted one that, in your words, is gloom and doom and are meaningless. So I'll read another one.

I am writing to say that the new budget with details released this past week is of great concern to me and my family. We are a family of four just making ends meet in Conception Bay South. My husband and I both work full-time and have two young children. We have a mortgage – thankfully our home was bought before the housing crisis skyrocketed – and two cars.

We both work in St. John's, but our work hours make driving together difficult. We have the usual bills, as well as trying to repay debt just after buying our home. We do not smoke, rarely drink, and only purchase clothing when it becomes necessary. Our kids have minimal extracurricular activities. My daughter is in two, my son is in one.

Right now we're living paycheque to paycheque with any extra money in a special account for the next round of bills. We have no savings for vacations or emergencies. We need repairs to our house and are not sure where to find the money. We are stretched to our limit. This really scares me.

Please, for the lower- and middle-income people, the people who will struggle the most in this budget, please do whatever you can to make it stop going through – at least, lessen the impact on us. I greatly fear my family and many others who are working hard for our families will end up in bankruptcy or homeless in this budget.

I guess that's another meaningless convoluted email, Minister. I'll read another one now and see if we feel the same way about this one.

My wife and I have had multiple conversations since word of the new budget dropped. We are a fairly young couple – she's 27, I'm 34. All the changes kind of scare us. We both have decent jobs and managed to buy our first home a couple of years ago in CBS. We manage to get through every day fine and always have food on the table. We have also talked about extending our family. We both have always wanted kids.

This new budget absolutely scares us. My wife worries about cuts. She works at MUN. We both worry about extra costs that are associated with this new budget. The HST hike, gas tax increases, as well as the new levies and taxes that are going to be applied. Although one or a couple of these things may not cripple our bank account, the combination of all these do scare us and really feel it's going to be extremely tough to make ends meet.

At this point, bringing a baby into this possible situation is likely not a great option which is quite sad. We'd love to play our part in extending the population of this great province. I fear our population is going to decline much more now and those who are open to moving off The Rock likely will again, and will likely make it tougher on those of us who choose to stay here. I agree some changes are needed to be made. I'm just not confident the new budget is going to help. I feel like it will hurt us more.

Another convoluted, meaningless email: As a resident of CBS, I voted for you as our representative. I hope we can trust that you see the wrong in the recent budget and you will stand with the people you represent and vote against this ridiculous budget that is sure to ruin the lives of many Newfoundlanders. I have never heard so many people speak of moving away, moving to their cabin or even talking about giving up work and turning to Income Support. How is this supposed to better our province?

Another convoluted, meaningless email – but they're not meaningless to us, Mr. Chair. They mean a lot to us actually because they're the true words coming from our residents in our districts. They're not filtered. They're read from the piece of paper they're written on. They're addressed to us. I take exception to the smart-aleck comments.

All we've done here this morning is read from residents. They may have come two months ago. I don't care if they came two years ago. They're from people we represent. We're their voice in this House and we'll continue to be the voice. We'll continue to read these emails. They'll be in Hansard. We'll stand up. We're not afraid to stand up and speak up for our residents, not a problem. We'll continue to do that.

Regardless of what the Minister of Education may call it and be the gloom and doom feature of this budget because he's like the attack dog. He gets up every now and then. They send two or three up every now and then. He'll get up on his high horse and he'll have his little say, then he sits down again.

I have to tell you, it angers me and I'm sure it angers any other person, if they want to play a clip of the nonsense he gets on with when he refers to – we're talking about people and how he tries to term us. We're representing the residents in our district. He should have more respect for the people.

I have time for one more there. They're all very important. I think they're very, very important, Mr. Chair: While I don't usually get involved with politics and the like, I'm not pleased in the way the current government has put together this budget. The item that really infuriates me is this levy. This I find unacceptable as it most punishes us for living in this province.

The dollar amounts tied to residents' income and percentage I have seen are absolutely unreal. As I've stated, there are changes but I still don't feel like there's a balance when you look at – like I said earlier, when you look at someone making \$700,000 have to pay \$1,800 and someone making \$100,000 has to pay \$700.

I assume we'll have an option of staying or moving out of the province. Moving looks like a good option right now. I know I'm not alone with this thought process. I'm not sure what you can do, but making government aware of the population's displeasure will be a good start.

Isn't that exactly what we're doing here tonight? Isn't that what this person asked me to do? I'm glad to be able to say I'm doing it. I hope they know that their email is on record. I hope they know that we're standing up for the people. My colleague for Conception Bay East – Bell Island is probably going to follow me with the same stuff, speaking up for the people.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm pleased to get up and speak to this bill again. Just to respond to the Member for Conception Bay South's comments, I wasn't saying those emails were convoluted or meaningless. Actually, I didn't use either of those words. I said that it was the most confusing – I could have said meandering – argument that the Opposition is making basically.

They stood up and they said – I'll just repeat again because maybe the Member didn't hear what I said. They said: Don't cut anything except for \$13.3 million annualized for full-day kindergarten, \$750,000 for the fixed link to Labrador and the monies for the seniors' advocate which they said is a luxury. That gives you about \$14.5 million.

The budget deficit going into this year's budget was about \$2.7 billion. So if you don't cut anything else and you don't increase taxes, or they don't tell us how they want to increase taxes, then I don't know how it is – I guess it's their diversification of the economy, which is borrow some from Scotiabank, borrow some from TD Bank, borrow some from BMO and borrow some from somewhere else and see if you can borrow somewhere else. That's the diversification of the economy that you get when you can only cut \$14.5 million facing down the barrel of a \$2.7 billion deficit.

That's what's confusing to me, not the emails he's reading out. You can't take a thousand different positions and say that's an argument. That is not an argument at all, that's just confused.

Now, the other thing that I said was absolutely confusing was the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island who stood up here repeatedly, actually has the gall to go out and present himself to parents in Portugal Cove-St. Philip's now as the great saviour of education out there and to complain repeatedly about overcrowding at Beachy Cove Elementary when he's been the

Member for that area for some time. The period of time during which parents have been asking for a school to be built to accommodate the growing community, the population size out there.

He was Minister of Transportation and Works who oversaw the one-year delay in the construction of the school. Now he comes to the House of Assembly in the middle of the morning and tells us this is all a great strategic plan associated with an environmental education program that only he knows anything about, because certainly no one heard about it in here before. So that's what he's saying now is the reason for the delay.

Those are the things that are just bizarre, that make no sense. It never came from any of the emails. It comes from what the Opposition is saying, because it's fine and dandy to sit there and complain and to oppose and to discredit and so on. I know, I did it over there. It's actually pretty easy to complain and to try and poke holes in somebody else's argument. What's much more difficult is to try and actually find workable solutions to difficult problems.

It's very clear to me that the Member for Conception Bay South is – well, he's not there yet. He's certainly not there yet if he just stands up there and puts words in my mouth, because that's absolutely not what I said. That's not new to the Members opposite because the facts aren't of interest to them. What is of interest to them is trying to whip up as much opposition as possible, which is their job as Opposition.

Like the hon. Government House Leader says, I could go into my email. I just looked a whole slew of them from *Budget 2013* which is where the budget, where the previous administration – the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island was there. He applauded it. He voted for it. He thought it was great, and they laid off well over 1,000 public servants – well over 1,000 – way beyond the layoffs that we've seen this year.

Many of the positions that have been reduced this year are actually through just the cancelling of vacant positions, in fact. Not that you'd ever hear that from them over there because they're not interested in that fact, not at all interested in

talking about the fact that they cut 160 positions from the school system, from specialist positions of all sorts.

I know the Member got up and he said there were cuts to special services this year. I don't know what cuts to special services there were. There were no cuts to special services. There were 27 new positions added for instructional resource teachers to work with children with special education needs. There were 115 additional student assistant hours added to this year's budget. That's confusing to me. That's the meandering argument that I see, completely detached from any of the facts that are in this budget.

You can't just stand up there and throw this stuff out and just expect people to believe those are the facts. Those are absolutely not the facts. You also can't make a mess. Either the mess that the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island made of the intermediate school planning for Portugal Cove-St. Philip's or the broader mess, the bigger mess, the \$2.7 billion mess that we're trying to mop up over here. Yet, the Members over there are saying, well, don't do it that way. Don't cut anything other than \$13.3 million for full-day kindergarten. They keep saying – I don't care if they call it all-day kindergarten or same-day kindergarten or any of the other things that they call it over there.

It's \$13.3 million annualized, it's not \$30 million. He keeps throwing that number out but that's not a fact either. That's false. It was \$30 million the previous administration set aside over three years for the creation of the program. That dates back to *Budget 2014*. It's not \$30 million; much of that money has already been spent.

Back to what I'm saying, you can't say don't cut anything other than a \$13.3 million program, a \$750,000 contract and a \$300,000 program. You can't say don't cut anything more than \$14.5 million, but clean up our mess. Don't increase any taxes, but clean up our mess. That's not possible. Some things have to actually change.

Now, if the Members have better ideas – I know we're building \$106 million worth of schools this year and other additions, modifications and repairs to schools; \$106 million in new school

infrastructure investment in this year's budget. If the Members want some of that cancelled than get up and tell us what it is, because they're not saying that. They're saying why aren't you building the extension to Riverside Elementary? Why aren't you building Coley's Point, the replacement for that? Why aren't you building a replacement school out in the Witless Bay, Mobile area? Why aren't you putting an extension here? Why aren't you doing this and why aren't you doing that?

How many extra hundred millions of dollars do they want added to the fiscal situation while not making any significant changes to taxes. How is it we're going to balance the budget over any period of time when you're sole idea is just to continue to spend and borrow and spend and borrow and spend and borrow. That comes to an end at one point because when we go and try to borrow money on the international bond market and our bonds are just a couple of categories away from junk bonds, which is stuff that no one in their right mind would ever want to buy, well we're leaving the province in an absolute mess.

We can't continue down the road to mess to ruin that that previous crowd put us on. They have put the province on the road to ruin and they're solution now is spend and borrow more and spend and borrow more. That is a recipe for nothing more than ruin. It doesn't make any sense to me.

If you have better ideas, tell us what they are. We haven't heard any. We've been here all night.

CHAIR: Order, please!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island.

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Again, it's indeed an honour to stand and speak to the levy bill, Bill 14, and particularly how it relates to the impacts it's going to have on citizens in our province.

I'm glad the Minister of Education used the word bizarre because there are a number of bizarre things that he's spoken about tonight. Extremely bizarre to me and to the multitude, the thousands of people who've written in emails, have sent letters, who put petitions together, who've outlined their concerns, who've protested, extremely bizarre. The first bizarre thing is how he trivializes people's view on education and the impact of it.

He talks about we're into a \$2 billion-plus deficit, and he plays down that it's only \$13 million you're going to save from our education system and that we're against all-day kindergarten. We made it clear; we had a whole debate about this. We were not against all-day kindergarten.

What we were saying, if you're not going to invest in that and keep all of the other programs and services that we've built to this point than we have a problem. You have to make a decision. It's much easier to make a decision around something you haven't had at the expense of something that's already been proven and works for the citizens of this province of ours, particularly its students. So that's what's bizarre.

What's even more bizarre – I think I have to remind the hon. Member and the Minister of Education about the timelines. I came into politics and representing the same district that he represented part of, where the school is being built right now, only a few months before he did. He came with an education background. This was his speciality. He came in to be a critic for one of the Parties as an education critic. So I thought he would be the be all and end all. He'd have a focus on how this would move forward.

I walked into the same meetings he was, and he was the doctor of education. I'd come from a different background in the education field, so I was willing to sit and listen. He would know it all. He would be able to move this forward.

We're dealing with school boards. We're dealing with how we would better educate our students, how we'd find the best facilities to do that. I waited, and he sat in the room. He said very little. I give credit to the mayor at the time, and the school council were the leaders there.

They took it and ran with it. We went to school board meetings. We went to public gatherings. We challenged the school district.

By then when I realized, well, I can't rely on my colleague who also represented that community – who has a background in education – to move it forward. So I said you know what? I'll do my part. I met with the chair of the school board. I met with a number of the school councillors. I lobbied the CEO of the school board themselves. I sat down with them. I sat down with the committees and we decided what it is that we wanted.

We went in and did our selling point to the school board. The school board came back and said we're making a motion to put forward to the government of the day a new school for Portugal Cove-St. Philip's, a five to seven school. We looked at it; a five to seven doesn't meet our overcrowding needs. That will achieve absolutely nothing. We went back and said that's not good enough.

While it took a bit longer and it delayed the process, we went back and argued. I personally had private meetings with these individuals involved to explain to them, to outline to them. I took them on a tour. I showed them the live birth numbers in Portugal Cove-St. Philip's to show where we were going.

At the same time, the Minister of Education was a Member who represented the same district that I did, the same community, the same kids going to the same school that we needed to do. The difference was he had a doctorate in Education. He was the critic of education. I was a backbencher. I started that process.

As we started to move forward, finally went in, won the right, won the five-to-nine recommendation. That was a recommendation then to government, to the Department of Education, to Treasury Board and to Cabinet that money should be invested to build a school of that magnitude for the people of Portugal Cove-St. Philip's. Still never saw the Member, the critic, never heard a word, even in the House for the next year, nothing – nothing being said about it.

We went and we lobbied. I came in, fought, worked with my colleagues, got the Minister of Education and Cabinet to approve stage one. I pushed that as fast as possible, got into a problem of identifying the best site. There was a dispute where the best site would be.

We put it in an area where there's already an existing school, makes it more congested. If you know Portugal Cove-St. Philip's you know the infrastructure, the road systems. Because it was a rural community until its massive growth spurt over the last 10 years, the infrastructure wouldn't be there for it at this point. We'd be adding problems.

We found a location that the town themselves owned. There were some challenges around not only putting it on that site because there were rivers and that through, but getting the town to agree to a costing amount. As a result, we let it go. As I've done, as we talked about in Coley's Point – and again had pushed the minister of the day to go expropriate the land, take it, we need to move it forward. Worked with the council and said we're taking this, it is too important.

So we took that, then it was around designing what would fit on that location and how we would work around the river. This is how the environment – have to be cognizant. If anybody knows Portugal Cove-St. Philip's it's all a three-river process, but added to this was a state-of-the-art \$5 million park. So we said here's the trade-off with the town. We'll work around your river system; we'll make it environmentally usable for everybody, particularly a teaching thing. We'll get the use, we'll have \$5 million which we can use in recreation facilities, a savings for the school district and that to be able to build a state-of-the-art facility, and then we'll work out a deal, what the proper costing is, but we're not going to delay the school.

We still went through the whole process. We did that, developed it. I, as the minister – the one who went down and said we're going to make this happen – worked with the school district, got it in play, went to a public meeting, explained to the citizens, took the scheduling down, took the mapping down, took the design down. We saw it and they all went through it and they were all very cognizant of what was happening.

Told them – very honest with them that it would be very ambitious to have it open for September 2016, but we would do everything possible to move it. People knew that; they accepted that. There are no arguments; there's no criticism around that. Would we have liked to have it? Sure, we would, but what they're going to have is a state-of-the-art school on a piece of property that's conducive to their learning in a safe environment. We're even doing the extra work on the roads.

That's what I did as the minister, particularly as the Member for that district when the other Member – who was the minister of Education and only up until six months ago was the Member for down there – was not to be seen. When things started to progress positively and when what he thought would be a lynching meeting became basically a very positive movement forward by the school council and the parents that we were moving things forward, all of a sudden things went astray for him. That's when I talked about how bizarre it is. When things fit the needs of him for him to be able to be negative and show that things are not moving in the proper manners, then they're all positive. But if they're not, they're bizarre for everybody else.

So these are the things we've talked about. Again, we talk about all-day kindergarten and what we support and what we ask to cut. We're asking to cut nothing in education. We feel education is too important. If you're going to play around with an \$8-plus billion budget where you're spending almost \$500 million more than we did in the previous administration last year, then obviously we're saying you should be able to find \$13 million.

If you're committed to education, and if the Minister of Education is so entrenched in ensuring that we move up, that we catch up as he called it, that our students catch up with the rest of the country, then I think he'd be the first one – I've been Treasury Board and I've been in Cabinet – beating the drum saying we're going to cut somewhere else, or we're going to generate more revenues somewhere else, or we're going to make a better deal with our federal counterparts to ensure that education is not compromised here.

That's what I find bizarre, extremely bizarre here, and how he trivializes all the impacts these education cuts are going to have on the people who have sent it in. We're talking students, educators, parents, community leaders. We're talking people at the school district level. We're talking not-for-profit agencies whose sole responsibility is improving our education system. But that's all trivialized because it doesn't fit in with his mainstream concept of how we make our education system better.

But apparently he's the only one who thinks that way. There's nobody else who can show the data or support it that says the approach he's using now is in the best interests of the students here. All this other documentation – and you can come over and see it, it's from everybody else. Not one thing written by David Brazil – and you know why? Because I don't think I have the expertise to be able to do it. But I guarantee you, the people around me, the people who have written all this and the people I've spoken to, they are the experts.

Do you know who are a lot of those experts? They're the school counsellors, they're the teachers, they're the parents, they're the community leaders. They're the students, they're the researchers and they're the educators. They're the ones who've dictated whether or not our education system is going to move forward with the cuts in this budget. And they've all dictated that it's going to be again regressive.

But the minister sees it differently. He calls it bizarre. It's all bizarre. It's bizarre that we would question that. It's bizarre that people would send emails. It's bizarre that people would be upset that their son or daughter gets their education system devised based on a lottery out of a hat, or a letter they get sent home. If it's a pink one or a purple one it's a different scenario, and the kids know that. It's bizarre if a young kid cries and says politicians are heartless if they don't reverse education cuts. That's bizarre. That's what this minister talks about.

I think he's out of touch with education. He's out of touch with reality when it comes to where people are coming from and the impacts it's going to have. He's definitely out of touch if he thinks what's being imposed by this administration and him as the leader, as the

Minister of Education, is going to do what he wants done for us to catch up – again I keep reiterating, I didn't know we were that far behind. If he feels we need to catch up, well I can guarantee you the process he is using and what he is proposing for our ability to catch up is going to make us so regressive we'll be another 20 years before we get to a point where we are even on an even keel.

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: Mr. Chair, I thank you for that and I'll have an opportunity to speak again before the day is over.

CHAIR: I remind the hon. Member that his time has expired.

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Labrador West.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's great to get up at this hour this lovely morning to speak on this bill. As has been said by many people in this House all night, I think everybody acknowledges the fact that we're in a tough financial situation in this province. I thank the Members from the Official Opposition for speaking tonight as well as the Members from the Third Party, the co-leader, with some very interesting words for us. Of course the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands, I also thank him for his input during the last eight to 10 hours.

I guess what we've heard all night from the Opposition, even though they recognize the fact that we do have a fiscal situation in this province that has to be dealt with, again I have to say, as I said the last time I rose in this House, that I didn't hear too many solutions to our problems, other than the fact that everything that we're doing is wrong.

Seeing this bill is about the temporary Deficit Reduction Levy, before I get into my other remarks, I just want to remind the people that we didn't like a levy any more than anybody else did, but as a caucus we worked with our Cabinet and our Premier and the Minister of Finance and once that funds were identified – as we've said

right from the get-go by the way, this is a temporary Deficit Reduction Levy. And as soon as we identified other sources of income, this would be the first thing that we would tackle, which we did. We made significant changes to raise the threshold from \$20,000 to \$50,000, which now means that 74 per cent of the people in this province do not – and I repeat do not – pay the levy.

We have Members in this House who say, well, that still doesn't affect my district; I've still got most of the people paying the levy. I'm sure that every district in this province has been affected when you go from – before the threshold was raised, I think the number were 38 per cent of the people in the province paid the levy, to when after they made the changes that 38 per cent climbed to 74 per cent. So I'm sure there are people in every district around this province that have been affected. As the Member for Stephenville – Port au Port said earlier, he went through the ranges. Even from \$50,000 up to \$100,000, we have seen a significant drop in the amount that people pay as for the levy.

One of the other things that Members wanted and the people were asking for was that they feel it wasn't fair because we capped it at \$900. Well, we also removed that cap. So I think we've made significant changes to the temporary Deficit Reduction Levy and we will make more, hopefully sooner rather than later. That certainly depends on the revenue sources that we find over the next two, four, six, eight months in front of us.

I respect the Members opposite for entering these emails. We received the same emails from most of these same people. We respect the hardships that people find themselves in and we respect their point of view. I'm glad that the Members have entered these emails into the official Hansard of this House and that their concerns are officially recorded. I thank the Members for doing that.

Mr. Chair, I will spend the rest of my time on this particular standing to look at some of the positive things in the budget. We've brought them forward before. The Member, I think it was for Conception Bay East – Bell Island, got up and tried to teach us on this side of the House and the people in the province all about

Labrador. As he was reminded by my colleague, the Member for Torngat Mountains, I think we soon found out that his knowledge of Labrador was a little bit construed, especially when it came to the Aboriginal indigenous people of the Big Land.

This government hasn't forgotten about Labrador. Yes, we've made some changes there as well as the rest of the province. But I'd like to remind the people of this great province that this Minister of Transportation and Works, through his budget, has invested \$63.7 million into completion of the Trans-Labrador Highway – and that's just our provincial share. Of course, the federal government will match that, or even, I would venture to say, may increase that amount as their share, so we'll have well over \$100 million to put into the Trans-Labrador Highway. That will go a long way to seeing the completion of the pavement all the way from the great community of L'Anse au Clair – which is my hometown – to the great Town of Labrador City – which is where I've spent most of my life.

So I'm very proud of that, and I know the previous administration as well put in quite a bit of money into the Trans-Labrador Highway, and certainly that was well appreciated as well. This government has not forgotten Labrador, and we're going to complete that job and complete the highway. One thing more – with that highway comes more transportation, more traffic, and more movement of goods and services. That's why we, in this budget, have decided to invest in updating the feasibility study so that we can start moving ahead with a fixed link across the Strait of Belle Isle, so that movement of goods and services will be able to continue uninterrupted, uninterrupted for 12 months of the year, so this province can grow and we can diversify the economy and to improve on the movement of trade to and from this great province.

That's why we, as a government, are investing in Labrador. We see the tourism potential that's there. Mining right now, Mr. Chair, is taking a beating. As I mentioned earlier, the commodity prices are down and iron ore is struggling today. It's up and down. It's very volatile, as it has been for some time. Because of that we've lost a great industry in Labrador in Wabush Mines. The people of Wabush are having a tough time

not only with the economy, but the 2,400 pensioners from Wabush Mines that have seen a significant, significant drop in their pensions. The unionized pension plan has seen a 21 per cent drop, and the non-unionized has seen a 25 per cent drop. We're working with groups to try to find ways to alleviate that burden that's been put on these great people of Wabush.

Do you know what? It's a very cyclical industry. Iron ore will rebound and we will one day again see that industry flourish. I'd like to remind the Official Opposition, Members of the Third Party and the Independent Member that Labrador West has always been a great contributor to this province in mining and Labrador in general, not only through the iron ore, but certainly through Voisey's Bay and in the Torngat Mountains region.

Mining in Labrador, through the iron ore and the nickel mines – and don't forget the great resource of the Churchill River, what that has done to the economy of this province. The Upper Churchill, yes, we could have gotten a better deal there, but there will come a day when we'll reap the benefits of that. Hopefully we can get the Muskrat Falls Project back on track and we can see some benefits from that as well.

Mr. Chair, I was going to get into the municipal issues within the budget which we've left intact, but I don't have time. I just want to say to the people opposite that Labrador is important to us. That's why the Premier has taken that position as the Minister of Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs. As was alluded to earlier, I think some people on the opposite side don't really think that he's doing that great of a job. I tend to differ and –

CHAIR: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member that his speaking time has expired.

MR. LETTO: – certainly we, as MHAs, will support him in his efforts.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Topsail – Paradise.

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

Good morning, everybody. Now we're closing in on almost 12 hours since this Bill 14 actually started debate. I was listening to the radio earlier this morning, I had a couple of hours out of the House, and they said it was 7:45 a.m. I think that's what they said, so we're 45 minutes off 12 hours. Our first 12-hour block, anyway, on debate of Bill 14.

For the people that are just tuning in this morning who are wondering why are we still in the House of Assembly since 1:30 on Monday afternoon, actually in the House of Assembly process it's still Monday here in the House. Even though it's Tuesday morning, in the House here it's still Monday. Come tomorrow it will still be Monday and the day after that will still be Monday as long as we continue to sit here without a break.

It is still Monday in the House; it's been a long Monday. We are debating Bill 14. Bill 14 is known as the famous levy bill, the levy which was changed from its original proposal. Now, government had committed and said there'd be no changes to the budget. The Premier and government are on the record: no changes to the budget, what the budget is, what it's going to be. They stand by it; not going to move it, not going to change it, and they did change it.

Thankfully, the federal government came along and had some funding, came up with some funding. Well, actually that's not right, Mr. Chair. They didn't come along with any funding. What they did was, they said to the province – the province has a payment due to the federal government. An equalization overpayment has to be paid back over a number of years, over a 10-year period. They had to make a payment this year, \$27 million this year.

The provincial government went to the federal government and they had a discussion. Now, the federal government said they only asked a week before the levy change. The provincial government, the Minister of Finance said it was December they started. In December they had discussions, in January they had discussions but

federal Minister Foote had said that the province had come to them a week before the levy change and asked for this.

What they've done is they took the loan repayment, instead of beginning the payments, as the government quite often says, kick the can down the road and pushed that out until it starts to be paid in 2022. That gave them a little bit of relief, and they decided they were going to make changes to the levy with that relief.

Now, it wasn't because they felt the levy was wrong because they stood by the levy; over and over and over they stood by the levy. They said it was the right thing to do. They had to do it and how bad things are and so on. The tough decisions they have to make. They had to make tough decisions.

Mr. Chair, yes, they are difficult, and decisions that you should focus on and you should make the right choices on. You should make choices that are consistent with the promises and commitments you made and choices that are going to be in the best interest of the people. While you have to do things that are not always going to benefit people, you have to make choices and decisions that are in the best interest of the people.

Sometimes in the world of politics and the world of governments it says you can't do everything for everybody. Simply put you can't. I said it myself when I sat over there. You can't be everything to everybody; yet, that was the commitments.

It sounded much like the commitments and the promises were made. However, this levy came along and it really seemed to a lot of people like, well, we'll put up the personal income tax rate, we'll put up corporate tax. We're going to increase the HST, like they said they wouldn't do. We said we would and they said they wouldn't. They put up gas tax to make us the highest gas paying province in the country.

They are putting retail sales tax on insurance premiums. They increased tobacco tax and so on and so on and so on. A bunch of fees they put in. I think it was 300 fees, either new fees or increase in fees, then came along the levy. It was almost like they were still short of what their

goal was doing all of that and decided then to put on a levy to create more revenue.

I should say to Members opposite, yes, I heard you say temporary Deficit Reduction Levy. Now if you don't mind me shortening it, I'll shorten it just to the levy or Liberal levy instead of saying the temporary Deficit Reduction Levy. It's the Liberal levy. People are really unhappy about this. People are really unhappy about the budget. Not just the levy, but the budget.

We heard overnight, some of my colleagues here read from the emails they've received, the messages received from people around the province expressing their view on the budget and on the levy. A lot of people mentioned the levy and a lot of people talk about the levy, but they still talk about the budget because the levy is only one small part of it. It was like an additional tax put on the people of the province because they still need to create more revenue.

I still say, Mr. Chair, there are different ways of doing that. There are different ways of creating revenue and balancing your books and reducing your expenses and so on. There are a number of ways and options that are available to government to carry out their goal.

They did change the levy, but that's not the only thing we've seen changed, Mr. Chair, because over time, and even since last year, there's been so many changes made by the government. I think maybe a little bit later this morning I'll talk a little bit more about them, about some of the changes that were made because we've seen that happen.

We don't have to go back 12 years or five years. We can go back 12 hours, 24 hours or a couple of days. We know, even in the most recent debates in the House here, what the people of the province have been most interested in was the debate around the occurrence of the ending of the employment of the former CEO of Nalcor and how all of that rolled out.

Then there was a commitment by the Premier: We're going to release all the information. He said we're going to release all the information to the public. I want to get it out as soon as I can, is what the Premier said. It's important for people to have the information, is what the Premier

said. He said it should be out there. Then there was, well, we're going to pass it over to the Auditor General. We don't want to interfere or prejudice his investigation and what work he's going to do, so we're going to give it to him and that's all we're going to do.

Then the Auditor General said that doesn't prejudice or interfere in what I'm doing. He said that's all right. He was asked by a reporter for *The Telegram*. He told them, look, that's fine. The Premier stood here and said we've passed everything over to the Auditor General and we can't interfere with his investigation. The Auditor General said he hasn't received anything yet. Not only that, it's not going to interfere with his investigation.

Then the Premier said – he was out talking to the media: Yes, we're going to release it all. It's important that people have all the information; we're going to release it all. Then yesterday when I asked the Premier, the Minister of Justice answered and said: no, it's solicitor-client privilege, so we're not going to release it.

That's the change in position that people are being accustomed to with the government that's causing much problem. They're not going to change the levy; they changed the levy. They're not going to change their position on matters; they did. So people learn and people become programmed to know that if we make enough noise and if are upset enough and if we are persistent, then this government will change its position.

Just like we've been persistent in Question Period on questions about Nalcor; after days and days and days we're still finding out more information. We're still getting more information and learning more about what happened at Nalcor by simply asking questions, straightforward questions, very simple and straightforward factual questions. Day by day we sit here and go: oh, well they didn't tell us that before, or that's different than what was said before.

It happened again in Question Period today – being yesterday, but at the start of this day it happened again where we found out a little bit more information. That's what people are now starting to talk about. While they're still very

concerned about the budget, they're saying these people keep changing their view and their position, or they change their answers or they don't give any answer. They get up and say all kinds of stuff but they don't answer the question.

As one of the reporters was reporting, who's here in the House of Assembly and said about one of the ministers opposite. He said, why does the minister keep answering questions that haven't been asked? I know we used to do it. I'd be the first one to say, Mr. Chair. I've done it myself where people get up, or the Opposition get up and ask a question about a topic, and there was some information that I wanted to get out about that topic. So I put it out there anyway.

Then the Member over here would get up and say you never answered my question. I'd say, no, with only 45 seconds to answer, I ran out in getting the information out I wanted, and now I'll answer your question; but over there these days, we can't get anything. They just continue to talk and don't provide information, or they'll provide a little snippet, which is okay, that's a little opening, an eye opening, or a little bit more information for us. Now let's ask more about that. As days go on we get a little bit more.

One of the former Members of the House here, who was a well-respected lawyer in my time, in my former career we had a similar kind of comment we used to say. He used to say it's like peeling the onion, he used to talk about. That is what he used to say, peeling the onion. If you want to find out information take the onions off, because onions have these very thin layers. You can peel off the onion one piece at a time. You have to be very patient and very slow as you move along to try and gather the information.

Mr. Chair, that's what we do as an Opposition. That's what we're elected to do. Members opposite were elected to govern. We were elected to the House as well, and by virtue of them having the most seats they become the government. We became the Opposition having the second most seats, and in the Opposition we have a role. We'll continue to do our role. We'll continue to peel the onion. We'll continue to ask questions, and we'll continue to do so on behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We don't simply just do it for ourselves. We do it for the people who want to know what is going on with this government, what are the impacts of the decisions they've made, how are they going to deal with these matters, what will be the impact on the lives of people.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Terra Nova.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HOLLOWAY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to comment a little bit about the last couple of points that the Leader of the Opposition made about their role – our role, of course, as government, and their role to ask good questions, or ask questions of the House and try to peel the onion.

I've had people in the district who have said to me: What do you think about the questions that are coming forward, in terms of trying to get the information out? I've said to many of my constituents that I welcome good questions from the Opposition and from the Third Party in terms of helping get really good clarity and good questions put on this hon. House.

I have to tell you, I've been somewhat disappointed in the kind of questions that have come forward. It's been very narrow in scope in my mind. I say that in complete honesty. Having been the first time elected here to this hon. House, I appreciate when people ask good questions. When I was out campaigning, I'd host these meet and greets and I'd stand up and I'd talk about a couple of things for 10 or 15 minutes and then I'd kind of open up the floor. I'd expect that people would ask some pretty tough questions.

I got to say, the questions thus far in this session of the House, I've been a bit disappointed. There have been some good questions, but I can tell you that by and large the questions that have come forward have been rather weak. I kind of hope that improves. If it doesn't improve by the time we finish this session of the House, I hope as we come back in the fall that it will improve and that there's going to be some better research

and we can get better information out on the floor and for the people of this Province. I want to say that, and maybe that will encourage Members opposite to do a bit more research when they're coming forward with those questions.

I want to talk a little bit about – we're here and we've been debating now for about 12 hours around the levy. Of course, it's a temporary levy and we've said we'll make changes as the situation in this province changes for us and for the people. But I also want to talk about one of the other temporary measures, which is around the increase in the gas.

I spent time in my district on the weekend. I left last Thursday evening and I went to my district and I was there on Friday and Saturday and Sunday, and I talked to people both in my district, and I actually went into MHA Bennett's district for a few hours one day, and people talked about the gas and the increase in the gas. I can tell you that from 7:30 on Friday morning until late into Sunday night, any time I have a conversation about the increase to the gas, the common response that I had received was, don't worry about it; we've paid higher in the past.

As I've listened to the debate here tonight about the gas, I actually did a little bit of research to see where has the price of gas been in this province thus far. I looked at comparing April for the last number of years. In April 2012 an average litre of gasoline in this province was 142.4. In April of 2013, it was \$1.27; in April of 2014 it was 136.4.

Of course a barrel of oil and the price of a barrel of oil went down over the last 12 months. In 2015 in April, it was 109.1. As of April this year it was 101.5. I guess my point is that we have paid higher. Of course that's what the people, the residents and the constituents in my district have said that we have paid higher.

One of the things I've heard in this hon. House is that's going to stymie tourism; people aren't going to come. We already know that our early numbers are showing that we're going to have an increase of around 18 per cent over last year. I saw some numbers within the last 24 hours that says there are a good number of accommodations, hotels, B & Bs that have

already said that they're at capacity. They have no vacancies available. That's a great indication for what the tourism industry is going to be like in this province this summer.

Some people might say: Why is that happening? How can that happen? Of course the value of the Canadian dollar is one of the factors here. The other thing that I would say to you – and I guess anybody that travels would know that if you're going to an area and people are coming to Newfoundland and Labrador, the fact that gas may be a little bit more right now, in the overall scheme of things in terms of what they're going to pay when they come to experience this wonderful place, this place that I dearly love, that extra in gas is not going to deter them from coming here. They're coming for the experience and they're coming for the people.

The other thing, Mr. Chair, that I heard things about is, well, you're spending more money. The expenditure this year is more than last year and we're talking about trying to save money where you have a large deficit issue. Of course it is about job creation. I heard Members from the Third Party talk about we're driving people out because the rate of unemployment –

MS. ROGERS: I never said that.

MR. HOLLOWAY: People are going to leave is what you said. So I had a look at the unemployment rate. I did a comparison over a number of years. In April 2012, the unemployment rate was 13.5. In April 2013, it was 13.7 – comparable. In April 2014, it was 13.6, the unemployment rate. In April 2015, the unemployment rate was 14.7. As of April 2016, it was 14.7. So even in the last 12 months, the unemployment rate is still the same.

The problem I have, Mr. Chair, is that all this fear mongering that's gone on since the budget has come down, it really disturbs me. I feel that it's very important; it's our duty as Members of this hon. House to make sure the constituents and the people of this province have accurate information so they can base their decisions on the right information, not partial information, not spinning of information but accurate information.

We've tried to bring that message forward right from the day we brought down the budget in April. Let's talk about the real information so that people can really be informed about the decisions they're making.

The other thing I'll say, Mr. Chair, is that when we talk about job creation and the kind of things that can help generate the economy here, one of the things we've talked in this House is about infrastructure and the need for infrastructure. Members would know and my constituents would know that a number of hours ago, I, along with the Minister of Transportation and Works, announced a couple of great projects in my district, one in terms of the Port Blandford causeway, doing some remediation on the causeway bridge to the tune of \$1.19 million.

That's fantastic that we've been able to do that. That's such an important issue we needed to address as we came into government so we could allow the good flow and people could get to work, coming from Bunyan's Cove and Musgravetown and into Port Blandford and going on to Clarendville, Terra Nova Park. That was an important link that we needed to address. It was something that needed to be done for a number of years. Of course with the support of the Minister of Transportation and Works and our government, we were able to address that issue.

The other one is the \$1.036 million to replace the Thorborn Lake overpass and improvements to the Thorburn Lake intersection. Another bridge that – and we know there are many of these across the province that are in need of rehabilitation, some work being done on them and some of them that need to be replaced. It was those kinds of investments that are going to help generate the economy and generate jobs in this entire province.

I am especially pleased that those kinds of investments are being made in the Terra Nova District to help the people to continue on, on the Trans-Canada and through the networks between the communities so that they can get to work and continue to contribute to the economy.

Those were a couple of great announcements. I know other people in my district have asked me about other pieces of infrastructure that will

need to be continued this year. I posted that on my Facebook page and I encourage the constituents and other people in the province to take a look at that list so that you know that there are other road infrastructure work that is going to be done this year.

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. HOLLOWAY: So, Mr. Chair, I'll be back again and I'll talk about other important things going on in this district.

CHAIR: I remind the hon. Member that his speaking time has expired.

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

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

Again, it's a privilege to get up here and represent the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis. It's interesting now to see the time of day we are in – we were here all night long and it was nice to see that some of the Members are deciding to get back up on their feet now and say a few words. But there are still a lot of Members over there that haven't said anything on this budget. I think the constituents and their constituents would like to hear from them and see what they really feel about the budget and let the people of the province know what they're hearing in their districts.

I just listened to a Member that time and it really does amaze me because people say to me, they have their head in the sand; they are just not listening to people. That's what you hear wherever you go to, that they are just not listening to people. There are demonstrations all over the province. There are demonstrations at schools. There are demonstrations here at Confederation Building. There are demonstrations in front of people's offices and everything else and they just still don't get it. They really don't get it.

The hon. Member that time said when he went back to his district nobody said anything about the price of gas. Nobody said anything. I don't know if he's familiar with what's happening out in society but 26,000 people were on the VOCM

website doing the Question of the Day and 89 per cent, the last I looked, wanted resignation of the Premier and the Minister of Natural Resources.

We have an online petition – as far as I know now, it is up around 20,000, or maybe it's a lot higher, looking for resignation. We saw last week the Angus Reid poll that came out and it showed that the Premier of our province in only six months in office, he was the second – six months ago, he was the second most popular Premier in all of Canada. Now, where did he go in six months? He went down to the last, from 60 per cent down to 17 per cent.

That hon. Member gets up and says everybody is telling him that everything is good in his district. I heard it tonight and a couple of people got up and they said the same thing, oh, it's great in my district. People are not talking about that. They're looking at this. I don't know if all this is wrong or people are just being nice to you, I'm not really sure.

I can understand why people are upset. People are upset in the province because there were promises made. Six months ago, before six months, we were in an election. People went out and I did the same, I knocked on all the doors that I could in Cape St. Francis. I really believe that I got them all. I know the last night before they said no b'y – there was one road I knew I didn't get, so I really wanted to go, and I think I knocked on all the doors.

I'll tell you one thing, Mr. Chair, what I did, I didn't promise the world to people in my district. All I did, I promised them that I'd work hard on their behalf. I told them if they called me, I would respond to them. If there was something that I could do, I would do it for them. That's what I promised people in my district.

At the time the political climate in the province was not in our favour whatsoever. I listened to some of the talk shows and people are saying they never really needed to do it; they never needed to go and make all these promises, knowing that they couldn't keep it down the road. Now they'll say, oh, we didn't know what the books were like, but everybody in the province knew what was happening with the

price of oil. Everybody in the province knew what effects the price of oil was as it went down. It went down fast. This effect was going to – the bottom line to our province was going to be huge.

The normal person, the person who's following it, knew exactly what was going to happen. We all did, but you still continued to promise the people. You continued to promise. You promised a brighter tomorrow, a stronger tomorrow and everything else.

The sad thing is you talk to people today and do you know what they'll say to you? They'll say, you know, I trusted him; I thought that they were going to be true to their word. We had the Premier go out and tell everybody, no HST. No way, that's a job killer. That's going to kill jobs in this province. We cannot increase taxes in this province because it's going to kill jobs.

Everyone that looks at this budget and anybody that's normal out there at all will look at this and say this is a tax and cut budget. Tax, tax, tax, increase tax, add new tax and then it was all the fees; 50 new fees they came up with – 50 new fees and 300 other fees that they increased. Now, did they promise the people of Newfoundland and Labrador this when they knocked on their doors? Definitely not – definitely not.

The people of Newfoundland and Labrador were hoodwinked I think. People in Newfoundland and Labrador feel betrayed. They felt that here you went and made all these promises, no layoffs. We saw the clip – and I watch the clip all the time when it comes up on TV. The Premier is there saying there will be no layoffs of public servants; your jobs are safe. Then what did he do when he got to the budget? Six hundred and fifty, and then – that's not the best of it. This is the problem that got a lot of people really concerned. They are talking about a second budget coming down now in October, and that's the one that has everybody in fear.

Everyone is in fear. The public servants in this province are in fear. You talk to every one of them and they'll tell you: I don't know what's going to happen in October. I don't know if I'm going to have a job. Now, what's that doing to our economy? What's that doing to confidence

in our economy? All this stuff that you're doing to the economy is hurting the economy. It is hurting business because people don't have confidence to go out and spend money anymore. They don't have the confidence to go out and purchase a new car or go purchase some furniture because of the unknowns.

You do not kill people with a budget. You just don't go out there and tax them and tax them and tax them and increase taxes and expect people just to say, okay, let's go. We'll spend money on new vehicles. We'll build new homes. The word that we used here four or five times: You're smothering the economy. People haven't got confidence anymore. The fear factor that's out there is unbelievable.

It is going to be an interesting day. I'd say if we get to Question Period today, it will be interesting to see what the Minister of Finance comes up with and who she blames the latest catastrophe on that was in the news yesterday with the nurses' union. I mean, unbelievable.

You need not worry, there will be a blame. It will be someone else's fault. Guaranteed, there'll be somebody else. They look at everything – it's the board of Nalcor. We didn't read the contract, but the board of Nalcor did. We just told them to give them the severance; we never knew what the severance was. It was always someone else's problem.

That's what we're hearing and that's why people are so upset in this province. They're seeing an incompetent government. They're seeing a government that is making decisions that are really hurting the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Earlier tonight the Minister of Education said: Where can we find the cuts? He added up \$14 million that we said about cuts. There's a contingency plan put in place, \$30 million for contingency, that was never there before. This is new money that was never put in the budget before and this year they decided to put it in – 2001, I'm sorry. It was there in 2001, and this year they decide to put it in – \$30 million. Yet, in rural Newfoundland we're closing 54 libraries because we're cutting the library board by \$1 million.

She could have put in \$25 million and maybe saved the Dental Plan, maybe saved our libraries, maybe gave our seniors a break where they wouldn't have to be paying for over-the-counter drugs now, drugs they go to the drugstore for and one time they used to get them for nothing. I had an 85-year-old man come to me and say: Kevin, the prescription that I was getting, I go pay for it now and it costs me \$12.16. He needs it every three weeks. He's 85 years old; his wife is home with him. That's huge for him because he's on a fixed income.

The minister and the Premier don't understand. They tell us we don't understand, we'd never understand. Always get up in the House – you don't understand, you don't understand. I believe you don't understand how the people of Newfoundland and Labrador live, how our seniors live, how people on fixed incomes live. I believe you don't understand how hard this is going to be on people in our province.

Our seniors who are trying to stay in their own homes now have to pay 15 per cent more for that insurance on their house. The people in the province have to go out and get new car insurance now that's going to cost them an extra 15 per cent. All this money is coming out of their pockets and they don't know where they're going to get the money. If anybody doesn't understand what's happening in Newfoundland and Labrador, I believe it's the Premier and the Minister of Finance.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

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

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

I'm happy to rise again and to speak to the Liberal levy legislation. Mr. Chair, I believe the Minister of Education was complaining about the fact that people were reading emails that were from weeks and weeks ago.

Well, what I did yesterday, Mr. Chair, when I knew we were going to be here all night and that we had the opportunity to speak on behalf of the people of the province is that I sent out through social media –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

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

I sent out a note through social media and I said to people, are there issues you'd like us to bring to the floor? I got a lot of emails, a lot of emails. So these emails are very current. As a matter of fact, some have come in the last few hours.

The wonderful thing about our democratic process is that there are ways, all of us, to bring the concerns of our constituents or the concerns of people from all over the province to the floor of this House to talk about them, to present them, to ensure that people's voices are heard. Because of social media, it means the people of the province can actually be part of this filibuster. They actually can be part of it in real time. That's a wonderful thing, Mr. Chair.

In spite of what the Minister of Education has said that this is just old news, in fact these are emails and concerns that people have brought to us within the past few hours. So he's wrong on that point. He's absolutely wrong. These people want to be heard.

Now, the other thing he said is by us reading these emails that in fact we are fear mongering. Well, these are the words of the people who are saying yes, please can you bring my concerns to the floor of the House. Again, these are the voices of people from across the province.

I'd like to read another one: Hi Gerry – and this came in very, very late last night. Hi Gerry, not sure if this is too late but I have many concerns about this budget. Not only the gas tax and the cuts to libraries and public schools but I'm really concerned about the Labrador Food Airlift Subsidy and the loss of the Home Heating Rebate program. These could literally have people starving or choosing between heat and medication – these are her words, not my words. These do not personally impact me and I am grateful for that privilege, but I am extremely concerned about this and the potential for people to become seriously ill.

If the survival of the people of this province doesn't qualify for the \$30 million contingency fund – I'm very happy, it's great to be able to stand up following my colleague from the Official Opposition who talked about this \$30 million contingency fund. If the survival of the people of this province doesn't qualify for the \$30 million contingency fund, what in the world does?

Can the Liberal government not see how cutting services to rural communities will increase service delivery costs further in the long run, that people who will forego visiting the doctor because of the cost of gas can potentially become seriously ill – that might be a little bit of a stretch, but this is a concern that's being voiced by this particular constituent.

Obviously, they don't care about the human cost but even fiscally this makes no sense. I agree with her on that, Mr. Chair, I absolutely do.

Anyway, I know I'm preaching to the choir here but these are my concerns at the very moment. There are many, many more but this is what I feel is the most pressing right now.

It's very interesting, Mr. Chair, because through the night I've been talking about what is the government's plan. We know the government and the Minister of Finance has said that she's cutting, cutting, cutting, and that she's cutting –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Chair, I can hardly hear myself with the heckling happening from across the floor there. I'm wondering if you could give me some protection.

CHAIR: Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: Thank you very much.

What I have been talking about is the issue of what is really – ultimately, what is the government's vision for the province and for the people? We know their budget is all about cutting and their promise to get back to surplus in seven years, but in the meantime, what will our province look like? What will happen to our people? We do know, and it says so in their budget, we will have increased unemployment.

We know one of the problems that we face as a province is a revenue problem, but tied to that revenue problem is a huge unemployment problem. My hon. colleague across the floor just talked and proudly said: Well, our unemployment rate is 14.7 per cent this year, or last year, and it was 14.7 per cent the year before. He was proud saying that we're not so bad off. You see, people aren't leaving.

It's odd that a government would be proud of a 14.7 per cent unemployment rate. It's the highest in the country. They are saying through their grim initiative, the government Renewal Initiative Program where they put measures to that, so the grim measures by this government through the budget are saying that they are going to create even more unemployment.

So I keep asking government, and the Minister of Finance or the Premier to tell us what his vision is. What is our province going to look like in five years from now? They haven't told us that. Will people be working? What will our education system look like five years from now? What will our health care system look like five years from now? What about diversity? What is their plan for green technology? What is their plan to diversify the economy?

There is nothing. I've scoured the budget looking optimistically, because I'm basically an optimist looking in the budget to see really what their plan is for that. Do you know what, Mr. Chair? I can't find it. The emails that we're getting from people is where they're saying as well they can't find it either. They're concerned because there's nothing in the budget to make them feel secure.

What this government should be doing is stabilizing the economy. In fact, by their own admission, they are destabilizing the economy. They know that production will slow down. They know that unemployment will increase. They also know that wages will stagnate. Now, that is not recovery.

Maybe we'll return to surplus in seven years. I don't see how that's possible, again, because we're not seeing any economic growth. So there's no money coming in. The only revenue that government can point to is picking people's

pockets. That's their P3 plan, so taking more and more fees, increasing the fees that already exist.

The levy now has been altered, which I believe probably shows that government didn't quite know what they were doing when they imposed that levy because they've had to repeal a good bit of it. Then, the way they did it is almost like making taxation on the fly. We know that doesn't work. I believe the levy in and of itself was a type of knee-jerk reaction in taxation on the fly. So here they are doing it again by repealing some of it so that nobody making under \$50,000 will have to pay the levy. I think that's the beginning of a step forward.

They promised – all we're seeing from this government are broken promises. I believe they don't want to break their promises, but what did they do? Everyone knew how bad the situation is. Perhaps it's worse than what government thought initially. Muskrat Falls is a huge part of that. We still have to have an in-depth discussion about Muskrat Falls. I talked a little bit earlier during the night about what we would do differently and I'll revisit some of those points again for people who perhaps were asleep during the night.

Mr. Chair, it's quite concerning that Members of the government might dismiss what people are sending in to us. It's not old news. This is current and people are participating in this debate and in this filibuster through social media. I'm hoping that people will continue to do that and that we will continue to bring their concerns forward to this House because this is where their concerns belong. Their concerns belongs smack dab in the middle of the floor of this House where we can talk about them in a respectful and a meaningful way.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I look forward to standing again.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Certainly to hear the comments about the debate that went into the night, being 7:39 a.m., some interesting comments on both sides. I heard the Member for St. John's Centre talking about all

night. I'd just like to point out that from 2:15 a.m. to 7:30 a.m. the NDP did not speak in this filibuster, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to clarify that. Between 2:15 a.m. and 7:30 a.m. the NDP did not speak in this filibuster. I just wanted to make that point quite clear before I go on because there was debate all night, Mr. Chair, but mostly it was led by the Opposition and the Member for Mount Pearl South.

I just want to go back to a few comments over the night. I especially want to go to the Member for Cape St. Francis when he talked about his district. It was actually quite enlightening. I heard the Member talk about some of the communities in his district: Bauline, Flatrock and Torbay. He talked about the major growth, the 900 students that are going into the school. How it's going to increase and how there are some 1,300 vehicles that travel the Torbay highway.

Anywhere in the province when you hear good stories like the Member for Cape St. Francis talked about last night, especially in a province where you have just over 500,000, it is good news to hear. I heard my colleague, the Member for Terra Nova, talk about the unemployment rates and that they remained the same.

I do have one question for the Member for Cape St. Francis. Like I said, he talked about the growth in his district. How does such a good news story support a mass exodus from the province? How does it support the fact that everyone is going to leave the province? How do you blame the people for leaving when obviously there's a growth in the population, and the Member for Cape St. Francis made it quite clear. He is very proud of his district. He is very proud of the growth and we are too, Mr. Chair. Any time there is growth in our province, we certainly endorse it and we support and we encourage it – and this, Mr. Chair, by the hon. Member's own admission.

Earlier in the debate the Member talked about the effects on young people. I would like to share his concern – we do share his concern about the effects on young people, but it is in a different avenue. We're also concerned about our future, our children. The difference is that we have no intention of handing a \$2.7 billion deficit to our children and to our grandchildren.

We will and we have taken measures to protect our future, to protect our resource, to protect our children.

If we do nothing, as the Opposition and the Third Party insists, we will be handing the deficit to our children, to our grandchildren. It may well be the plan of those Members across the way – it could be their plan, but it is not our plan. It is not our plan to leave our future generations with what the previous administration created and handed to us. We do not intend to hand that on.

I listened to the Member for Cape St. Francis talk of the fire trucks. Well, I'd like to go back to 2014, Mr. Chair. The previous administration was coming up to an election year and I think they handed out nine fire trucks to different districts, within their own party. I asked Municipal Affairs, the Member for Mount Pearl North at the time, if there was anything being done about an application for a fire and emergency vehicle for the community of Nain. Do you know what he told me, Mr. Chair? He told me that there wasn't any funding left for firefighting. But guess what, Mr. Chair? They announced six fire trucks after that. They announced six fire trucks after that.

Again, I listened to the Member for Cape St. Francis talk about full-day kindergarten, or as he calls it same-day kindergarten. It's the same comments he made on the PMR last week. So, Mr. Chair, I'd like to make the same comments as well.

We can put off full-day kindergarten. Well, guess what, Mr. Chair? In my district, at least four of six communities have had full-day kindergarten for about six years now. It's not that it's not being done. He talked about the children getting up and going to the bus. Well, it gets dark a lot earlier in my district in January.

I was out here 4 o'clock this morning and it was dark. Back home in my district this time of the year, the sun is shining and it's reversed in the winter. We don't have school buses. These kids have been going to school for six years in the dark and, in some cases, they walk. The rule for temperature in the district that I represent, Mr. Chair, -45 is the cut off. If it is -45, those kindergarten kids don't have to go to school, but

in -44, they do. They don't think twice. They go to school.

I just have a few minutes left so I'll talk about the opposition to this budget. I remember when we were in Opposition going into a deficit; we were never told what the deficit was. We knew there was something happening. We stood and opposed the budgets for the simple reason is that we knew where it was going. We didn't have the real numbers, but we knew where it was going. It was only after the government changed, Mr. Chair, that we realized how bad it was.

It wasn't \$1.1 billion that the former administration told the people of the province the deficit was. It was \$2.2 billion. It was double and if left unchecked, it would have gone to \$2.7 billion. This is what we opposed. We opposed a deficit that was building without the knowledge of what the actual numbers were. What's being put out there to the people of the province now is what the Opposition wants the people to hear. That's what's being put out there, what they want them to hear.

As I said earlier, the job of government is to mitigate the impacts of a budget designed to address a \$2.7 billion deficit. The job of the Opposition is to magnify those impacts. Do you know what? The irony in all this is that the Opposition and the NDP are doing whatever they can to leave the deficit unaddressed and leaving the opportunity for the deficit to balloon even further. They want us to hand this deficit off to our children, but we're not going to do that, Mr. Chair. We will address it, we tackle it, we will do here, and we will do now with or without them.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune.

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

I'd like to start out this morning by commending my colleagues here in this hon. House for another great night in the people's House. As my colleague for St. John's Centre has eloquently stated in her speech, this is indeed the people's

House, and it's quite an honour for us all to be here and bring the people's views forward, Mr. Chair.

The reason we've been in debate now since I think it was something like 7:45 last night we started debate on Bill 14 is because the people of the province have stated quite clearly, quite strongly, quite loudly, that they are very displeased with the entire contents of *Budget 2016* and, in particular, the Deficit Reduction Levy.

I do strongly believe that as a result of the outcry from the people and the pressure in terms of the continuous emails and the continuous calls to Members on all sides of the House that government did go back to the drawing table, did seek – with a lot of lobbying and pressure from the public – some additional support from Ottawa, and brought back some \$32 million, Mr. Chair.

Again, in terms of what other provinces are doing and what other provinces are receiving from Ottawa to deal with this oil downturn, oil crisis, I guess, in the global economy, these other provinces have yielded far greater than \$32 million. In fact, they've brought billions back to their province and we have \$32 million. So we do expect a stronger fight and we do expect more to be done in that regard, especially given that the idea of having a Liberal government, as we were told in the election, both in Ottawa and here in Newfoundland, would yield us better results.

Well, we've yet to see that, Mr. Chair, but we certainly hold out hope and encourage our colleagues to very much go back to the table and look for more that can be done to help us through this transition as we deal with the global crisis.

Mr. Chair, what government is all about really is protecting the people, ensuring that basic services are in place for people such as our health care, our schools and our roads. In the long run, ideally, we would have a government that has a strong emphasis on economic diversification so that in the long run we can generate revenue, we do not have to rely on the taxes, we do not have to burden our public with taxation as an only means of providing these

services but we can generate business. We can attract the private sector. The private sector, in turn, becomes the engine of growth. They create the long-term, sustainable jobs and they, in turn, pay the corporate income tax which helps us provide the basic services.

One of the things about *Budget 2016* that really alarms me is the message that we are sending to the business community both within the province, across the country and, indeed, outside the country, Mr. Chair. I scratch my head sometimes of what the global community must be thinking as they watch the goings on here in this House since April 14 from the budget right on through to today. My fear is that potential investors might be deterred, and I certainly would never want that to happen.

What I think is important is not that we portray the doom and gloom message, as Members opposite would have us believe, but that we really emphasize and highlight the true potential that Newfoundland and Labrador really does have – our natural resources, perhaps, being one of our greatest wealth resources that we have available to us.

We certainly still have plenty of oil, but oil is an industry, as we all know, it's non-renewable and it's not going to be there forever. So I strongly believe that we need to look at opportunities such as renewing our fishing sector and hydroelectricity as well, Mr. Chair, is a phenomenal renewable resource. As long as water flows, there is money to be earned from public utilities. I think this province has vast resources in that regard.

As we all know, the infamous Liberal hydro deal from the '60s that we're locked into until 2041 is not reaping many benefits for Newfoundland and Labrador. The bulk of the benefits of that project are going to Quebec. For every billion dollars we make on the initiative, Quebec makes about \$80 billion. They have fabulous schools, fabulous health care, fabulous road networks, all because of the resource right here in Newfoundland and Labrador. We cannot, whatever we do, allow that to happen a second time, Mr. Chair.

I know when I was in university one time, we had a prof come in for a lecture and he was from

Ontario. He said thank you, Newfoundland and Labrador; your cheap power has really enabled us to build Ontario. We have factories in every community and, in some communities, on every street. Thank you, Newfoundland and Labrador. You didn't get much out of it, but thank you; we got a lot.

What we have before us today is a real opportunity – we can export our markets. We're no longer limited, Mr. Chair, to the Quebec corridor. We now have an alternate route under construction, which will open up the Eastern Seaboard to us as an export market. I truly believe that is one of the initiatives as we go forward in the non-renewable sector that in the long run will generate significant wealth and returns for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador – our forestry sector and agriculture as well. We really have to have a competitive structure in place whereby the businesses in Newfoundland and Labrador can succeed.

Government's role in that regard is to create the climate so that investors have confidence in the skill sets of our people, and they have confidence that the government is a strong government and can lead us to prosperity. They don't need to worry about setting up a business in the province one year that is a viable business and, within a year or two, have a government come in that whacks on so many taxes that's it's no longer a viable place to do business anymore. That is why this budget, in particular, is so particularly alarming, Mr. Chair.

I do believe one of the Members opposite spoke just a little while ago and they got up and said, well, Opposition is standing here in the filibuster and only putting out there what people want to hear. What I would challenge to that, Mr. Chair, is the Opposition Members are reading, in large part, concerns of the people. People who have stayed awake all night and watched this debate, it has been fascinating – when I woke up this morning I had my eyes glued to the Twitter box again and reading Facebook and reading the various news sites. People are very, very, very concerned. We cannot overstate that enough.

What we can't seem to do is have Members opposite realize how devastating this budget is really going to be. Just think about it. Regardless of what your income is, just think about having

two whole months of a paycheque gone, vanished. Because that's about the incremental additional costs, proportionately, you're putting on people.

I don't know how many of you can actually relate to this, but I can relate to it quite well, and I represent many people who can relate to it quite well. You have a fixed income; you know where that \$40 a month is going so you can get your hair cut in two months' time. You know where that \$20 is going so that when the time comes for your grandchild's birthday, you have a present. You know how much money you can put aside so that when Christmas comes, you have a gift you can afford to get for your grandchildren and your loved ones.

This budget's going to take all of that away for the people on fixed incomes. It's going to devastate people who have high health care expenses; diabetics who are now going to be limited in the number of strips they can buy for their diabetes. What is the long-term cost of that really going to be? Will that translate into more heart attacks, more strokes, and more kidney failure because people are unable to properly monitor their diabetes? All of these things, Mr. Chair, the budget is imposing on the fine folks of Newfoundland and Labrador, and that's why we are engaged in this filibuster because we really implore that Members opposite take a second look.

While we are pleased that there were some changes made to the original levy, it still hasn't gone far enough, Mr. Chair. The amount of the levy that they are looking to receive for this year – because it's only half a levy – you could find without imposing the levy; you could find it just by delaying full-day kindergarten and reallocating your contingency slush fund from \$30 million down to a much smaller number, Mr. Chair, and right there you have the levy for 2016 taken care of. If oil prices have not rebound by next year, deal with it then. At least people know in advance and they are a little bit prepared and the shock factor is not as severe as it is today.

Time is quickly running out. I look forward to much more debate as the day goes on.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for St. John's Centre.

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

I'm happy once again to stand and to speak to this levy. Mr. Chair, again, as I had mentioned throughout the night, people have been sending me emails indicating issues that they would like brought to the floor for consideration. Some of them have concerns about the budget and the impact either on them personally, or the impact that they foresee on the province and the province's economy and the province's future. Or some people are also sending emails with suggestions, potential solutions to some aspect of the budget and to some aspect of the challenges of the economy that we as a province face.

This particular email, I found very interesting. It's from a woman by the name of Monique Tobin. Monique is a researcher and an academic. She said: Hi Gerry, I've been listening and appreciating how clearly you are articulating our – the collective our – concerns in this budget debate. Thank you.

I keep thinking of Doug House and the Economic Recovery Commission which pointed to a required reset that involved the input of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in order to set a future course, ensure a future even.

She sent me a little bit about the Economic Recovery Commission which began in 1989. Many of us remember the great work undertaken by Doug House who was an academic with Memorial University. I'm going to be reading a little bit from a review of his book entitled, *Against the Tide: Battling for Economic Renewal in Newfoundland and Labrador*. That was published in 1999. That was 17 years ago that it was published.

In the review it says: "It is this world that Memorial University Sociology Professor J.D. House stepped into when he agreed to chair the Economic Recovery Commission (ERC) from 1989 to 1996, a provincial agency set up by the Newfoundland government of Clyde Wells.

Against the Tide attempts to both be a 'personal account' of that 'difficult period in the recent history of Newfoundland and Labrador,' as well as an 'objective' account of 'the facts as I know them' – these are the findings of Dr. House – "as the commission endeavoured to provide a plan for the shift from the 'old economy' based on resources exports and transfer payments, to a 'new economy' which was more diversified and self-reliant. In order to achieve this renewal, the commission adopted an 'integrated approach' to social and economic development" He set that out in his book.

It's very interesting, Mr. Chair, because that's exactly what we need in our province right now. That's what people are hungering for. That's what economists are directing for us as well. We have to shift to a diversified economy. We have to plan for that, but instead government hasn't done it. The previous government didn't do it. This current government has no vision for it. So we are stuck in that mentality of megaprojects, reliance on oil and look where it has gotten us.

Then the megaproject to beat all megaprojects, the straw that breaks the camel's back is Muskrat Falls. I remember, Mr. Chair, shortly after I was elected in 2011, I was on a media program and there was a panel. We were talking about Muskrat Falls. I said, I have my dancing shoes right here for me, but I'm not ready to put them on until three questions are answered. This was a position that our caucus took, the NDP. We talked about it often in the House. The three questions that were outstanding for us: Is this economically feasible? Is the Muskrat Falls Project environmentally sustainable? Is the Muskrat Falls Project good for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador?

I remember at the time I said, I believe that once all is said and done, that in fact the Muskrat Falls Project will cost at least \$12 billion. They laughed at me. I said I believe it will be at least \$12 billion, but I have my dancing shoes here and I hope to God I'm proven wrong because if I'm proven wrong, if those three questions can be answered, is it economically feasible, is it environmentally sustainable, is it good for the province, I will put my dancing shoes on and I will dance in the streets. But, Mr. Chair, there is no reason at this point to be dancing in the streets.

As a matter of fact, it's a catastrophe right now and has become the tail that wags the dog. There is \$1.3 billion again this year in this budget being transferred to Nalcor for the Muskrat Falls Project. Closing libraries, closing schools, closing medical clinics, cutting the Adult Dental Program, discontinuing over-the-counter medication, the levy increases and almost every fee we have to pay to the provincial government has been increased and new fees added.

I'd like to go on a little bit about the Economic Recovery Commission and what Dr. House said. In the review of his book, the reviewer goes on to do a summary for us, "Although Premier Wells created the commission, House argues that, in large part, the Premier remained wedded to the views of the Old Guard" – so it was really hard to get the mechanism of government to be open to and to move into a recovery model that looked at an integrated approach to our economy – "despite the ERC's attempt to convince him otherwise. When the Tobin Government was elected in 1996, it immediately shut down the commission."

This commission that had done so much work around looking at, how do we deal with unemployment? How do we get communities vibrant again and sustainable? The work was incredible. It was almost 10 years of in-depth work that involved consultation with communities, that involved community development, that was looking at an integrated approach.

One of the things that Dr. House said – and this is quoting Dr. House. This is from the findings of the work that he has done: "The economy does not operate in isolation." We know that. We can see the effects of that. "Successful economic development depends on successful social development and sound environmental management. Education and training ... – and what this government is doing is cutting back on education, closing schools, cutting the allocation to secondary education and primary education; also a cut to Memorial University when, in fact, we should be supporting Memorial University to be an absolute centre of excellence.

He said: "Successful economic development depends on successful social development and sound environmental management. Education

and training, employment programs, social-security reforms, transportation and communications, infrastructure development -- all need to be coordinated and integrated so as to contribute to economic development ... At the regional level, this should be done through the leadership of the twenty regional economic development boards"

Well, what we've seen this government do – this is after years of study, years of planning, government has done absolutely the opposite to this. What government has done is cut on training, cut on apprenticeship support. They've cut on employment programs. They've cut on social-security reforms. There is no renewed transportation or communications. They've cut on infrastructure development by \$100 million at a time when they should be at least stabilizing or increasing it, getting people to work.

He said that all this needs to be coordinated and integrated so as to contribute to economic development. There is nothing in this budget that points to government's plan to contribute to economic development. Again what they're saying is that they are cutting, cutting, cutting and looking at getting to surplus in seven years.

Nobody can imagine how they are going to do that, because there is no indication of any growth whatsoever in the economy? As a matter of fact, they are showing how the economy is going to slow down. We're going to see an increase in unemployment.

He finishes this by saying: "At the regional level, this should be done through the leadership of the twenty regional economic development boards" Where are our 20 RED boards now? How many RED boards do we have? Do we have any?

The RED boards were the heart and soul of the rural communities. They had their fingers on the pulse of what's happening in our communities. The RED boards were vital to the economic development of our communities –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: – which are the backbone of the economic development of our whole province.

“As opposed to the ‘cargo cult’ mentality of economic development where prosperity is supposed to crash land in communities in the form of mega-projects, House makes an excellent case for a ‘vision’ for Newfoundland and Labrador, which would put it at the ‘very forefront in the sustainable development of its economy and society.’” This government has done the exact opposite, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member her speaking time has expired.

MS. ROGERS: Thank you very much.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Natural Resources.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. COADY: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the budget and the levy. I was listening to the hon. Member opposite and I was reminded – she was talking about the number of emails that she’s received. I, too, have had emails.

Last night I received one which I think is important to remember. The person’s email – being said, you have to remember John Crosbie’s quote that he didn’t take the fish out of the sea. I paraphrase, Mr. Chair, because the hon. House, nor did this government, the new Liberal government, make this incredibly difficult financial situation the province is in today.

Mr. Chair, I remind all Members of this House that we actually were faced with a situation where last year’s deficit – when we took office and when a new government came to sit at the table, we realized that the financial situation of the province was double negatively than what it was when the budget was brought down. They told us it was going to be \$1.1 billion which was bad enough and it came out to be about \$2.2 billion.

Mr. Chair, that is an untenable situation for this province to be in. I’m sure you’ve heard over the last number of weeks we’ve talked about how serious our debt and deficit situation is. If you look at 66 years that we’ve been involved in Confederation, we amassed an \$11 billion debt, but that was for the schools, the hospitals, the roads and the infrastructure that we’ve been using in this province over those last 66 years.

Mr. Chair, if we do nothing, if we do not address this very serious problem, in the next five years we will double that debt. Now think about it, it took us 66 years to amass \$11 billion. In the next five, we would double it. While we did not create the situation over the last 12 years, we certainly will address it.

Mr. Chair, I also note a couple of other important issues because when we talk about what we’re spending our money on – and we’ve heard lots of Members on this side of the House talk about it in the last number of hours and the last number of weeks, the last number of months, how we are in such a difficult situation but it didn’t have to be this way.

Over the last dozen years we’ve taken in \$25 billion in new revenues in offshore oil and gas – new revenues. I’m not talking about what we took in, in terms of personal income taxes, or lottery taxes, or corporate taxes. I’m talking about new revenues because we were reaching peak oil and because we had peak price.

Mr. Chair, over the last dozen years, health care in this province has risen 142 per cent. We were spending, a dozen years ago, \$1.2 billion in health care. Now we’re up to \$2.9 billion. Despite that significant investment in our health care, we are still ranked, by the Fraser Institute, last in value for money.

Mr. Chair, that’s pretty serious. When you think about the investments that were made in health care, 142 per cent increase, \$1.2 billion to \$2.9 billion, roughly the same number – actually we decreased, I think, in those dozen years in terms of population, but we’ve doubled, more than doubled, yet we’re still ranked last in terms of value for money. Very serious.

Mr. Chair, let’s talk about the education budget. A 71 per cent increase since 2000, yet enrolment

at the same time – so we had a 71 per cent increase and enrolment declined 36 per cent – 36 per cent, Mr. Chair. That’s astounding. A 71 per cent increase, yet we had a 36 per cent less enrolment. Despite those increases, despite the significant investment we made, the Conference Board of Canada said that earned us a D. Scoring worse than the lowest-ranked international country, despite those investments. That’s pretty serious.

Mr. Chair, \$950 million will be spent in debt servicing. Think about what we could invest in, in this province if we had that money today. Just think about what we could do with that money.

Mr. Chair, despite all these things – and I don’t want to dwell solely on the negative, because the Member opposite was talking about well, what are we doing to increase and how we are encouraging.

Let me just tell you, I spent the weekend in your lovely District of Baie Verte – Springdale at a mining conference. I thought it was a very well attended, very interesting, very enthusiastic, a lot of good work being done. It was certainly a pleasure to be in the company of the great people of your district and to hear and talk about some of the investments, some of the innovations in the mining industry that are occurring.

I was really enthused to hear about how the first mining development actually in the province took place in Tilt Cove in 1864. It was one of the world’s largest producers of copper at the time. So it was kind of the epicentre, the heart of the mining community. It went on then to Betts Cove and Little Bay.

Today, Baie Verte has very successful mines at Anaconda and, of course, at Rambler. They’re using innovation. They’re using investments from RDC and from Memorial University. They’re looking at what they can do to improve their productivity, what they can do to ensure their mines are viable and are exciting and have a future.

Let me talk a little bit about some of the future projects, some of the things that are happening that I heard about in the mining industry, because I think, Mr. Chair, we’ve been speaking

a lot about our deficit. The Member opposite reminded us there are investments to be made; there are exciting things to be done.

I want to encourage people in this province to understand, yes, we’re in a difficult financial situation, yes, this is a tough budget but there is opportunity. There is a bright future. We just have to get our debt and deficit under control. We have to make sure we are putting emphasis and focus in the right areas. We have to make sure we are not accumulating more debt and deficit, especially for our future generations.

Well, let me tell you some of the exciting things that are happening in the mining industry. Anaconda, for example, their Point Rouse project – some very promising results, and they’ve expanded their reserves based on the acquisition of the Viking project in White Bay. We’ve got Rambler Metals and Mines. They just received some more financing; a \$19 million expansion plan for the Ming Mine project. They’re looking at examining the economic potential of the Hammerdown gold mine near Springdale. We’ve got Benton resources and Puddle Pond Resources, they’re continuing to explore for gold.

Minco and others are advancing their base metal projects near Buchans. We’ve got Marathon continuing their gold projects in Central Newfoundland. We’ve got Canadian Fluorspar doing some great work in the great District of St. Lawrence. We’ve got Vale. Vale is starting an underground mine in Voisey’s Bay and we’re looking forward to that. We have a very well-planned and well-managed mining industry in Newfoundland and Labrador, very well planned and well managed.

Mr. Chair, I’m looking at some of the investments my department is making in the mining industry. For example, we’ve made investments in this year’s budget in ensuring that we have orphan and abandoned mines – we’re ensuring the protection of those because it does lie with the responsibility of the province. We’ve made investments in the geological survey. We’ve made investments in the junior exploration program to encourage mineral exploration.

Mr. Chair, as the clock starts to wind down, I thought it was important to take the opportunity this very morning, after a long night of discussing the levy, after a long night of discussing how serious a financial situation we are in, to talk about some of the bright lights in the mining industry. The great things that are happening around this province, and this budget, the budget we've just recently brought down, the budget that takes the difficult steps forward to ensure we have a viable future in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Remember, Mr. Chair, as I said, we cannot continue to spend and spend and spend. Yes, investments are required but we also have to ensure that we have the ability to borrow, we have the ability to invest and we have the ability to ensure that our province is left in a better place than when we found it. It is about our future. It is about the future generations of this province. I will take the opportunity at some point to talk about the exciting oil and gas industry that we have.

Mr. Chair, yes, the levy is required. Yes, Mr. Chair, we have to make some of these difficult choices because we have to ensure that we have a future, a viable future.

CHAIR: Order, please!

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

MS. COADY: Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Ferryland.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's a pleasure to rise this morning to speak to Bill 14 and have a few words. We certainly had a fulsome debate over the past number of hours, starting last evening. It will continue through the day, no doubt, as we work through Bill 14, which is part of *Budget 2016*. Obviously, it's been a significant piece of legislation and specific to the budget.

I listened attentively to some of the comments made by the Minister of Natural Resources. Indeed, it's been our philosophy over the past

number of years, since being in government, the previous administration, we do believe in the future of Newfoundland and Labrador. We believe in the great commodities we have. We believe in our natural resources. That's why we put in place many programs and services to support that and to drive economic development, and that's why we have seen some of the growth in economic development over the past number of years. That's money well spent. I think the hon. Member would agree with that.

One of the initiatives that we looked at was research and development. The minister herself recognized the investment in the Research & Development Corporation, which she didn't mention, but that was something that we modeled in regard to driving activity in the private sector and in natural resources and in various disciplines in the resource development. That was modeled actually after Norway in regard to engaging with the private sector, leveraging dollars, matched with public dollars, to drive economic and, most importantly, drive research and development because that means greater returns for all concerned. That's extremely important.

That's an initiative we drove. I think initially, over the past number of years, we put about \$25 million into the Research & Development Corporation. They've worked with the oil and gas sector, the mining sector. The minister mentioned Baie Verte Mines as well, what's happened down there. I know when I was minister of innovation, business and rural development we did a number of projects with those mines as well. That's driving technology, new opportunities, new ways of doing things; new efficiencies within those industries would allow new dollars, new growth and new partnerships. That's so very important, and that's what we did.

It is important that we continue to do it. But my understanding this year in the budget, RDC has been cut. There has been about a \$2 million cut in the Research & Development Corporation. As we move forward, in times of the economy starting to slow, it is very important that it is not time to cut things like research and development and activity in those sectors because that's the time when we need to really reach out, continue

to grow, continue to make new ways of doing things so we continue to drive our economy.

Obviously the traditionally industries, those dollars that are in the economy is good, but to grow your economy it's new dollars, new investments and a new way of doing things. That allows our economy to be stable but also have growth and, indeed, that is so very important.

She also referenced when she went through and talked about royalties and what was achieved over the past number of years which return. When they get up and speak on the other side, they seldom mention the fact that through our equalization program, as we came off equalization leading up to 2008, obviously those dollars that were coming into the province from the federal government we used for programs and services, they needed to be replaced. So those equalization dollars aren't just pulled out and magically we don't need them anymore. What happens when those federal dollars are pulled out, provincial dollars need to replace them.

That's very important to understand that. So over the past decade there has been about \$10 billion that as those federal dollars come out, provincial dollars need to replace them. Obviously we need money from royalties and taxation and all those things we do, they needed to be replaced by provincial dollars and that's what happened. So that's at least \$10 billion over the last 10 years. So I think it's important to recognize that when you come off equalization – a great national program in terms of assisting provinces in what they do. We haven't had a lot of luck under this administration in terms of dealing with that or getting anything else from the equalization program.

They have been very reluctant to talk to the federal government about it. But as that money is drawn down or not drawn down anymore, under the program there's a requirement for that to replace – it's common sense – and provincial dollars needed to be raised to replace that. Over the last 10 years, it's been roughly \$10 billion that has been replaced. And that's fine because the way that works provincially, as you generate revenues, you are able to provide those programs and services and you're expected to make your way when you can.

There is a formula in the termination in terms of what's your fiscal capacity is, how it's calculated and based on that you are entitled to equalization. I guess one of the things we talked about over the past number of months or weeks is the stabilization fund, which is a small component of equalization. That looks at the very quick reduction in royalty revenues from natural resources for any jurisdiction. It drops, I think, 50 per cent, then you are entitled to stabilization.

Now, we weren't entitled to very much. I think we were entitled to \$32 million, just in the stabilization component. The overall equalization bucket for this year, if you will, is about \$18 billion. We're not getting much of that, but that component alone recognizes under the principle of equalization if there's a dramatic reduction, you should be compensated. I guess we argue that we should be compensated far more than the \$32 million that we're getting just to see us through.

I think the other night in the debate I heard the Minister of Education reference the fact that, well, we're going to Ottawa looking for money. We're part of Canada. We're 10 provinces and three territories that have programs that as a member of this federation, we're able to access those programs. There is nothing about – whether it is health and social transfers, whether it is equalization, whether it's infrastructure programs, all those programs are there for provincial jurisdictions to avail of. So in times of need if there are programs to avail of, you go and avail of them. There is nothing wrong with that. That's what they are there for. Why wouldn't you?

Up to 2008, we certainly availed of them. I think over that decade, going back from 2007-2008, any particular time we would have availed of anywhere to a billion to \$1.5 billion at any particular year in regard to access to equalization. That's all about delivering a standard level of services and programs across the country. That's what equalization allows you to do.

What we've seen here in this budget is that we just taxed and gave fees to everybody, fees to the limit, to try and maintain those programs and even improve some of them, rather than

pursuing other options. And that's the issue. It's been very limited in terms of what we have done. It's detrimental to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and this levy is a classy example of what it's going to mean and how difficult it's going to be for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

We all realize that there were significant decisions that needed to be made and we keep saying it's about choices. All of a sudden, the other side will say we had no choice. You always get a choice; there are items you can do. You have choices. There are always choices. You lay it out.

They made a choice to bring in a levy and then, at some point along the way, \$27 million showed up and they were able to reduce it. So I guess that was a choice. It was a choice whether they brought the levy in or they didn't. It was choice that supposedly they negotiated in January or December about getting a payment on an equalization loan kicked down the road to 2022. They didn't get it relieved. They just got it kicked down the road and said you don't have to pay it now, but in 2022 you can start paying it. That was a choice, so it's all about how you manage that and see your way through.

In that actual circumstance, they went through a budget process last fall and into, I guess, the new year; but at the same time, they were talking about getting relief from this equalization loan. They never had it as part of their budget, but then, just some time ago, after the budget was done, the federal minister came down and said she'd been negotiating for a week. We heard the other day in Question Period that this was being discussed in December and January.

So that's interesting. Why are you discussing something in January and February and not including it in your budget? That would have been a choice that could have been made in regard to the actual levy, in regard to closing of libraries, in regard to reduction in busing, in regard to teacher allocation. All of those kinds of things are choices that can be made at a particular time and how you're operating.

It's really unique that they say we had no choice. You always have choices. As you're building a budget, as you're executing that budget, I

suggest as you're changing the budget, as they did with this levy – there was going to be no changes. We heard the Premier from time to time, going through it, there were going to be no changes. Then magically they get \$27 million and then the whole equalization payment is kicked down the road. They kicked the can down the road for 2022. They didn't get relief from it; they just kicked it down the road to 2022.

In terms of budgeting, being clear with a path and a plan, there's not good indication there that there's fiscal management and understanding long term on what we're doing.

So, Mr. Chair, it is certainly a pleasure to speak to Bill 14 and, as the day goes on and we get into the evening, I certainly look forward to speaking many times in regard to the many issues related to Bill 14 and related to the overall budget.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I certainly must say this has been an interesting exercise. For me, it's a new exercise. For me, this is my first exposure to a filibuster. I'm not too sure it's a good idea for people of my age to be losing as much sleep as I have, but I know it certainly has been interesting. It is interesting to listen to the debate. It is interesting to listen to the Members opposite.

I just want to say thank you to the Members opposite for the fact that they have taken this opportunity. This is a democratic right that we have and I really want to commend the Members opposite for taking the opportunity to speak on behalf of this bill and certainly express their opinions and express the opinions of their constituents, which this is really what it's all about in this House.

Mr. Chair, I always take it as an opportunity, as a privilege, to stand in this House. We are representative of the people. The people put us here and I think it's important and incumbent upon all of us that we have to take our responsibilities seriously. And I really want to thank the Opposition Members because they are taking their role seriously. It is the purpose of the Opposition to make sure that the government side are accountable for the actions that we take and I think that's an important role that they have to play.

There are a number of issues that have come to the forefront on a number of occasions with regard to some of the actions that we've taken. I guess, Mr. Chair, one of the areas that I have somewhat of a concern is the fact that under Transportation and Works, we do run a ferry service. That ferry service is run to many municipalities in the province that the only access they have to the mainland is through the ferry service.

Mr. Chair, in this province we have for many, many years highly subsidized our ferry rates. As a matter of fact, we were looking at somewhere in the vicinity of about 97 per cent subsidizing when it came to ferry rates. We have made some changes. We have proposed some changes that will be effective this coming fall and made some changes to ferry rates. We have increased them somewhat. I know that some of the Members opposite have questioned that.

We fully realize that people who are living on islands require a service and we provide that. Some of the Members opposite have used a fact that our ferry rates are fairly high and now are becoming higher and all that sort of thing.

If I have permission, Mr. Chair, I'd just like to mention we do have a ferry service on the South Coast of the province. It connects Newfoundland and Labrador with Saint-Pierre and Miquelon. I'd just like to mention my understanding is the ferry ride from Fortune to Saint-Pierre and Miquelon is roughly about 55 minutes. We have a number of ferry services within our province that are equivalent to running 55 minutes.

I just want to bring to the House's attention that if you were going to Saint-Pierre and Miquelon and returning from Fortune, for an adult return,

\$93; if you're an adult, one way from Fortune to Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, \$63; if you are a senior – and what we've done, we've looked at and tried to take care of our seniors. I just want to give you a rate for a senior. If there's a senior in Newfoundland and Labrador and they wanted to go to Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, they would be paying on a return \$88. A senior one way is \$52; an adult disabled is \$58; an adult, one way, disabled, \$45.50; an adult return group, \$88.

These rates, Mr. Chair, are for a ferry service that's equivalent to some of the ferry services that we have in this province where we're charging \$5 and \$6 for the same length of time that will be involved in a ferry. When the Members opposite have a concern about those rates, I have a concern as well, Mr. Chair. I have a concern because of the fact that we – and it may be a right that we have – are subsidizing quite substantially. It really does place a bit of a burden on the taxpayers of this province.

As I've said before, I fully understand, I fully appreciate the fact that people who are living on an island, they have rights and we have to provide a transportation system for them. So I'm not putting those rates out there to say we don't provide that service. I'm putting the rates out there as a comparison because a lot of times people don't want to make comparisons. People don't want to think there are rates being paid in other areas that are quite extensive.

I do have some rates as well, Mr. Chair, that I won't bring to the floor at this particular point in time but we have comparable rates. We've looked at rates in British Columbia where they have a ferry system as we have. We are, of course, the second largest province that are dependent on ferry services. When we look at a comparative study, the rates that are in BC, we are nowhere near the rates they charge.

So, Mr. Chair, while we don't really want to be in an area where we have to increase rates, sometimes we need some sort of return. Again, I just want to make it clear that we are 94 per cent subsidizing rates on our ferry services.

Mr. Chair, I thought it was important to make that reference this morning because we fully understand we have problems in this province. The problem we have in this province is a debt

problem. We have taken some measures to offset that debt. We are nowhere near it. We have a lot of work to do.

I guess one of the things we have to look at is we have to assume our responsibility. How do we want to model a sustainable province in the future? I want to say that a sustainable province to me is not a province that is going to be borrowing and borrowing and borrowing. A sustainable community, a sustainable province, a sustainable country is never built on status quo. It will never work. We cannot continue status quo, and as a result of that, Mr. Chair, we've had to make some difficult decisions.

I think all of us, and we have repeatedly said this, we've repeatedly said it, this is a budget that really was making tough decisions, and it's not something – there's nobody, nobody in this House that takes any pleasure in having to raise taxes or cut services. Nobody takes any pleasure in that, but, Mr. Chair, there are circumstances whereby sometimes we have to make decisions that will offset – if we are providing services, we need to offset that by revenue. If we cannot generate the revenue and we continue to have the gap between expenses and revenue continuing to grow, Mr. Chair, we will never have a sustainable future for this province.

As a senior, Mr. Chair, I stand here today because of the fact that I do take pride in my province and I do want a future for my grandchildren and I want a future for my children in this province. As a result of that, Mr. Chair, it is necessary for us to take the steps we've taken, and we need to understand that we need a sustainable future for this province.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: Order, please!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am delighted to stand once again and speak to Bill 14, the levy bill. Of course, this really ties into the entire budget and that's why many of the speakers are not talking just to the levy, but certainly to the budget itself and this being part of it.

Mr. Chair, I have to say when I saw *Budget 2016* for the first time I knew there was going to be – everybody knew there were going to be some tax increases and some cutbacks and stuff. I think everybody expected that, but, Mr. Chair, from what I campaigned on to what I saw in this budget, I have to be honest with you, I felt – and this is how I felt, and other Members can comment for themselves whether they felt that way or not – like a snake oil salesman. That's how I felt, because I felt I had been deceptive to the people at the doors – unintentionally, because I was campaigning based on the content of the platform, or the red book.

We talked about the stronger tomorrow. We talked about no layoffs. We talked about the 2 per cent HST was a job killer. That one came up – I don't know how many times I said that at the doors. Someone was talking, I said: well, we're not going to increase the HST. The PCs are going to increase the HST; we're going to roll it back. That's one big difference. That's one reason why you should vote for us, because they're going to do that and that's a job killer. I said that at many doors.

So I have to say that when the time came and I saw the budget, that's how I felt. I felt like I had been deceptive to the people who elected me. That's how I felt. There are a lot of people who feel that way. There are a lot of members of the general public and people we're hearing from, we're receiving emails from and so on, who they feel that way. That's where a lot of the anger is coming from, I really believe that.

Now, Mr. Chair, I want to go back to the whole concept of the budget and –

MR. JOYCE: (Inaudible).

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs, he's here now and he's started already. I don't understand what it's all about. I'm not saying anything to him; I'm not saying anything about him. I don't understand what it's all about, but anyway, I'll try to continue again.

Anyway, I've heard people talk about the fact that on the government side, if we did nothing – they keep going back to the fact if we did nothing, then they're talking about the amount of debt we would be in – \$30 million, whatever the case it is, in the next five years if we did nothing. Again, I want to go back to the fact that nobody over here is saying do nothing. Nobody is saying do nothing.

I heard the Minister of Education talking about the only suggestions that were made, he said, was \$750,000 for the Labrador link that could be delayed, given our circumstance. The seniors' advocate, he said, and the full-day kindergarten. Now, those were the three measures that he said – they were the only three things that anybody over here proposed is a way of things that we could put on hold or whatever in order to save money so we wouldn't have to tax people or we wouldn't have to make some of the cuts.

There are some other things that have been raised, and I'm just going to raise them again. One of the other things – and I don't know exactly how much money it is, but I've said it before, I'll say it again, that on the gas tax, 16½ cents, and there's 15 per cent on that. A portion of that is federal tax. The feds are taking 7 per cent of the 15 per cent. HST is a harmonized sales tax. It is not provincial. It's provincial and federal. There's a portion of that the federal government would be, I guess, capitalizing on our austerity measures. So I don't know what that amount is.

Again, I asked George Murphy because he crunches those numbers. He told me it was \$20 million. Now that might be wrong. If someone is telling me it's wrong, if it's less than that, that's fine. Tell me what it is.

MR. JOYCE: It's none.

MR. LANE: Okay. The Minister of Municipal Affairs says it's none. I hope he can explain it. If he can explain it, perfect. If I'm wrong tell me

I'm wrong. I have no problem with it, but it seems to me HST is a harmonized sales tax. It's federal provincial. So they're getting a share of that tax money, unless there's something I'm missing here and I'd love to be corrected.

We have a \$30 million contingency. Once again, that's \$30 million – it's a good idea in principle. No one is arguing with the principle, but we haven't done it since, I think someone said 2001, so why start now given the circumstance that we're in.

Another thing we could be doing is going to Nalcor, because the Minister of Finance, I think, has said, or least it was reported she said, that she had gone to all the departments – at least that's what was out there – and said I want you to save 30 per cent over the next couple of years or whatever the case might be.

So if that's the case, and you can go to the departments and ask them to do the same, to do that, why can't we go to Mr. Marshall – he's a smart man, he understands the business and whatever – and ask him to go in there now and sharpen his pencil and see if he can find us some money. So then instead of having to give \$1.3 billion to Muskrat Falls, maybe we only need to give \$1 billion. Maybe he can find the 0.3. Ask him to sharpen his pencil the same as we're asking the departments to sharpen their pencils. So that's another suggestion

Of course, the other thing, Mr. Chair, is – which we haven't heard a big lot about but we did hear about in the election and leading up to the election. We heard this: diversify the economy. That's what was said, and I know it's not as simple as just snap your fingers and the economy is diversified. We all know that. I'm not suggesting that, but it would be nice to know what some of the plans are.

I did hear the Minister of Natural Resources when she was up, she talked about she had gone to a mining conference and there were some positive things there, and that's good. I'm glad to hear it. Now granted, some of the things I heard about St. Lawrence, I think that was already in the works. I don't think that's anything new. I think that was on the go a while. The underground mine at Voisey's Bay, I'm pretty sure that was announced under former

Premier Dunderdale, if I'm not mistaken, that negotiated that. I could be wrong, but I think so. I don't know if there are a lot of new things.

In terms of that, I can remember we had the LEAP. Everyone remembers the LEAP. It was called the Liberal Economic Action Plan, maybe. I think that's what it stood for. At the time, Members in the Opposition were saying it was a leap of faith. They thought it was funny. I don't know if I necessarily thought it was funny at the time. Maybe I did. Maybe I didn't. I don't know.

Whether you thought that was funny or not, the bottom line is that we did have people going around doing consultations, all around the province, speaking to all these business leaders and industry experts and town councils and whoever else they spoke to. They were going to come back with all of these ideas of things we were going to do to diversify the economy.

I haven't heard a lot of them. Now, I'm not saying there's nothing in the works. I hope there's a ton of things in the works, but I haven't heard anything about them. Maybe it would be an idea for the minister, when she gets up again, if there are some things that are coming out of LEAP, besides oil and gas because we talked about we can't be totally dependent on oil and gas. There has to be other things around agriculture and the fishery and IT and tourism and all this kind of stuff. So it would be interesting to hear if there are any substantive plans as it relates to actually diversifying the economy beyond oil and gas and mining.

Not that oil and gas and mining aren't important, they certainly are but we haven't heard a whole lot beyond that. If we don't diversify, then all we're going to be doing is just simply crossing our fingers and hoping for commodity prices to rise on oil and gas and minerals. Unless that happens, we're going to continue to be in trouble. It would be interesting to hear some of those things as well, Mr. Chair.

I will take my seat now. I'll let whoever else wants to get up now and speak about it certainly can.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm just going to stand and have a few minutes. I don't want to say anything about the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands, but I always said if you have a difference with a party, you should shake hands and say here's my difference and walk away. That's what should happen.

Mr. Chair, there are Liberals here on this side, we all understand this budget is a budget no one wishes they had to bring in, absolutely no one wishes they had to bring in, but part of this budget is \$74.6 million for the low income and for seniors in the province. If the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands is saying I'm only here to represent my own constituents, why didn't you run an independent? If you weren't concerned about the people, the lower income people, all you are worried is your own constituents whose better off – and he said it here in this House, they are better off than most average people. Fine, I congratulate them. I'm glad they are.

But if you were going to run just for your constituents who are much better off than, say, 75 per cent of the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador who is not going to pay one cent levy, you should have ran as an independent. Don't run as a Liberal and we bring in funds, \$74.6 million, to help out low-income individuals in the province and say, oh, that's not good enough for me because my constituents are in a much higher bracket. That's what you should have done.

Don't criticize us now for taking care of the low-income people in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. If you had a difference of opinion – and I don't mean to start any arguments here today – you should have called the Premier aside, sat down with the Premier, shook his hand and walked out; not stand up here, not notifying the caucus, not notifying the Premier and just walk out. Now all of a sudden he is the big hero in the province because my constituents are up here and the lower end down there and I'm not concerned about them.

He said it. He said all I'm concerned about is my constituents. That's kind of hard to take, Mr. Chair. That's kind of hard. It's kind of sad. That's kind of sad when the people on this side

of this House of Assembly, we're dealing with Ottawa, with Judy Foote and the other six MPs looking for funding for rural Newfoundland and Labrador for water and sewer, but that doesn't matter because they are up there.

His constituents are up there, but you didn't seem him run as an independent, saying if anything happens that's going to hurt my district, I'm going to vote against it. That was never told to us during the election. That was never told to us when he was out campaigning with the Liberals.

So please if you want to represent your district, I have no problem, but don't be condescending on this Liberal budget who's here trying to ensure that rural Newfoundland and Labrador survives. I can assure you that, Mr. Chair, because people on this side here are working for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Is it a tough budget? Yes. Are there measures in the budget we wish we didn't have to take? Yes.

People are saying, well, don't talk about the past, don't talk about the past – why not? I know here for weeks the Leader of the Opposition who is sitting over there now was grilling the Premier on this Ed Martin severance that they put in place. They put in place, Mr. Chair. Let's get this straight. That former government had that package in place.

I ask the Leader of the Opposition who is sitting there, when you are standing up next, when your government was here and Derrick Dalley was sitting in that seat and Astaldi built that dome, and one of the reasons why they got that contract was because the dome was in the new technology, get the work done quicker. They built the dome; they tore it down when Derrick Dalley stood up in this House and said Astaldi paid 100 per cent of that dome.

I ask the Leader of the Opposition: Why didn't you ask Nalcor and Astaldi questions then? Millions and millions and millions of dollars spent on this dome – millions, no one will ever know the amount – to put it up and take it down. Why didn't you ask questions then?

Mr. Chair, when Muskrat Falls – cost overruns billions, billions. Why didn't the Leader of the Opposition, who was the premier at the time, ask

questions then instead of writing blank cheques? Just writing blank cheques saying here, go fix the problem. We've been asking for years, give us an update. What would we get is six months, four months update, not the long-term update of Muskrat Falls. That's what's happening. Then all of a sudden, we're stuck with this big, huge deficit, almost a \$2.8 billion deficit.

Oh, don't bring up the past, you can't bring up the past, but you stand here every day, ask questions. The Leader of the Opposition, who was the premier of the province, how many questions did he stand up in this House and say, no, Muskrat Falls on schedule, getting a bit of pressure, on schedule. How many times did they stand up in this House, Mr. Chair, and the 12 per cent contingency fund said, no, that's still intact. Why didn't they ask the tough questions then? Why didn't they ask Nalcor the tough questions then to find out what's going on with Muskrat Falls?

So we can't bring up the past, but it's all right to keep grilling today. You never did your work. What I say to the Leader of the Opposition for years you did not do your job. That's why we're in this mess we're in, Mr. Chair. You didn't do our job; they did not ask the tough questions here. That's why we're in the mess we're in today.

I find it funny, Mr. Chair. They all say, well, Muskrat Falls is going to bring in all this money, bring in billions to the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador – going to bring in billions. Who's going to pay for it? It's the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. If anybody here in this House thinks that right now that if you have to pay – if you get \$60,000, you have to pay \$100,000, \$200,000, wait until your light bill comes in, whenever that's going to be.

We don't even know when it's going to start, Muskrat Falls. They didn't even ask the tough questions to say when will Muskrat Falls begin, we need an end date. It's changing every day. This is why I'm so glad the Premier and the Minister of Natural Resources – at least they're asking the tough questions, Mr. Chair.

You could stand up all day about Ed Martin's severance. Sure, it's a hot-button issue. The Leader of the Opposition, who was the premier,

put it in there, but he didn't ask the tough questions for the year and a half when he was leader.

Who paid for the dome? Who put it up there? Who paid for it? How much did it cost? He didn't ask those questions. Where did the 12 per cent contingency fund that they stood in this House and said day after day after day is still intact. Guess what? It wasn't intact, Mr. Chair.

When you stand up and ask these tough questions here today just remember, Mr. Leader of the Opposition – you just remember – you were sitting in that seat. You had Nalcor. You had Ed Martin in front of you. You did not ask the tough questions which you should have as a premier. You did not ask the tough questions. I can tell you when you want to talk about the deficit here and how bad we are, you just remember you were the part that put us in this situation.

Mr. Chair, I've been around a lot and I go around to a lot of the districts. I've been in the district – and I said it last night and I say it again I was down to the Great Humber Joint Council. Sure, the gas tax got brought up. The Premier said it's a temporary levy; it's going to be reduced. The reason why we had to put it that high is because we can always reduce it, we can't put it any higher. Once we reduce it, it's down and it is temporary.

Do you know the big issue at the Great Humber Joint Council? It was waste management. Now for God's sake don't look over and say we did it. Don't say we put the waste management. Guess what, Mr. Chair? That's the biggest issue, what it's going to cost municipalities, the extra costs. It's going to start at \$90, I think now it's up to \$225. That's the going rate that it's going to be right now, \$225 per household per ton. Now, that's where it's starting now. That's the big issue.

So when you say, well, go around and ask your constituents, I'll tell you something, Mr. Chair, all the people here stood by with the federal government, Judy Foote and the other six MPs. We were up in CBS, we announced \$24 million which this government – \$34.9 million had an agreement, wouldn't even sign it, didn't even bother to sign it.

Minister Foote and myself went up, Mr. Chair, \$24 million. Right now, there's another \$20 million, \$21 million, \$22 million in Ottawa. Yesterday and today we're sending up ready to go, probably up there now, get this – and this is what this caucus is working for – \$140 million for water and waste water in this province. So I ask the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands: Do you think that's going to help stimulate the economy a bit? Do you think it is?

MR. LANE: What?

MR. JOYCE: One hundred and forty million dollars for water and waste water. That's the kind of things you're saying, well, they haven't seen anything. That's the work we're doing for rural Newfoundland and Labrador. It might not affect Mount Pearl as much, but it is affecting rural Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Chair.

Sure, it's a tough budget, but you take when Lake Harbour – if they get their water and sewer. You take Irishtown-Summerside. You take all the rural parts –

CHAIR: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Minister that his time is expired.

MR. JOYCE: I'll be back, Mr. Chair. I just hope the Leader of the Opposition is going to answer why he never asked the questions.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Order, please!

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Topsail – Paradise.

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

The debate continues on Bill 14. It's nice to always hear the Minister of Municipal Affairs back on his feet. He likes to rally the troops over there. Yes, he's been around here a long time. He's got a lot of experience. He's got a lot of knowledge, but he seems to confuse some of the facts. I'm sure he didn't do it intentionally.

He said when the Ed Martin severance was done – the deal was done, he said, and he said the

Leader of the Opposition was in there when the deal was done, is what he just said, Mr. Chair.

MR. JOYCE: (Inaudible).

MR. P. DAVIS: That's what you just said. You said the Leader of the Opposition was in here when the deal was done.

Well, Mr. Chair, the truth of it is, the deal was done in 2009. Now, I remind the Minister of Municipal Affairs that while he's been around for a long time, he's been here a long time, I don't remember a time when he stood in his place and said you shouldn't lower taxes. You shouldn't spend money in my district or you shouldn't make investments. I don't remember him saying any of that, Mr. Chair.

I'll tell the Minister of Municipal Affairs, in 2009 when the deal was done, I was not here. I wasn't even in the House. So for him to look across the House and say – there is he pointing at me across the House and saying the Leader of the Opposition was there when the deal was done. The Leader of the Opposition was there. He did it.

Well, it's not accurate. It's not true, Mr. Chair. The accurate statement is the deal was done – because if you can remember during all the debate about Nalcor, Members opposite talked about: It's not us. It's the board. The board has full control over that. Remember that? The board has full control. This is the board, not us. It's not us, never us. It's always somebody else's fault. This time it was the board. The board does the contract.

Mr. Chair, if we think about 2009, who was on the board in 2009? What sat on the board of Nalcor? Well, the Minister of Finance did, Mr. Chair. The Minister of Finance was on the board in 2009. She was on the compensation committee who did the deal. It was the Minister of Finance who actually did the deal.

I'm glad the Minister of Municipal Affairs reminded me because I wasn't going to bring this up today. I had no intentions of going back to the contract and who did the contract and so on, but the Minister of Municipal Affairs got up and said things that we're true or accurate so I

had to fix it, Mr. Chair. And it's the Minister of Finance who did the deal, Mr. Chair.

MR. JOYCE: (Inaudible).

MR. P. DAVIS: Now, the Member opposite – I sat here quietly and listened to all his misinformation that he said here in the House. I never interrupted, never heckled, but obviously I'm not going to get the same respect from the Minister of Municipal Affairs. I hope I do, because I'll give him the same respect, because he's usually a good fellow. I'll give him that. Lots of experience, usually a good fellow, but sometimes he just goes off track, he blows a gasket and away he goes, and he starts saying things that are not accurate. He starts saying things that are not true.

So, Mr. Chair, the truth of it is the Minister of Finance was on the committee, on the board of directors – actually went on to become chair. She was chair 2011-2012, chair of the board, and then she left and went on to other enterprises and other businesses that actually – one was a business involving the actual project, Muskrat Falls. She actually created a group to support Muskrat Falls before she went into politics. She had a group campaigning in favour of the Muskrat Falls Project. She was actually on the board when the oversight process, the contract development process, was all put in place. She was chair of the board for some of that, Mr. Chair. She was actually chair of the board, and she was the one.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs, I know he's going to get up again, so maybe he can set the record straight and point out to the people of the province it was actually the board of directors – as they like to say – who did the contract, and the board of directors at the time was the Minister of Finance who sat on the compensation committee in 2009 when the contract was done, and it wasn't the current Leader of the Opposition, myself. I wasn't even here. I was a police officer back in 2009, I wasn't elected until 2010, and I wasn't even here. So for him to say that is just wrong, and I'm sure he'll correct that.

Now, I know the minister likes to get up and say what he likes to say. He also talked about the temporary levy, and when he was talking about

the temporary levy he used the words, the Premier said, the Premier said. Well, Mr. Chair, I'm just going to point out to Members opposite that the people of the province for several weeks have been contacting us over the budget – I was going to say proposed budget, but it has now been passed by the House.

The budget was brought to the House and we heard different versions of what took place and what was happening with the budget. We've heard so many changes in answers from the Members opposite it would be difficult to make a full and complete list. But the conversation, because of that, has now changed, and the people of the province are saying today, well, when Members opposite, when the Premier gets up and answers a question, how can we just accept what they say and move on? Because, it's becoming habit, it's becoming normal for Members opposite to change their position as time goes on.

So when the minister says the levy is only temporary because the Premier said, well, with all due respect to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, and the Premier, and to all the ministers over there, the people of the province are not willing to readily accept what they say because of their own history over the last six months. They made significant campaign promises. They made campaign promises. They're going to get up and say we didn't know.

Well, most people in the province certainly knew. They certainly did. Anyone who kept an eye certainly knew. They're going to say, oh, the Member of the Opposition wouldn't tell us, wouldn't give us an update. No, I wouldn't, Mr. Chair. I'll tell you now I wouldn't because we were waiting for a significant milestone in making that assessment, and that was when OPEC met in December.

When OPEC met in December and they didn't make adjustments to reduce supply and reduce output, we therefore would have increased the price. When they didn't do that, the price continued to fall and fell substantially. I think it was around Christmas – I stand to be corrected, Mr. Chair, I think it was around Christmas or maybe right after Christmas or right before, during, anyway, I don't remember exactly now. The Premier said we've lost \$400 million since

the 1st of December. Just since the 1st of December, about a month, or it might have been five weeks. The Premier said we've lost \$400 million just since the beginning because of the falling price of oil. That's why OPEC met in the beginning of December.

If I had to have given or if we had done an assessment based on the information we had before OPEC met, the Premier also would have been standing up and saying that the former premier lied. That's what would have happened. They would have been out saying: oh look, you tried to win the election by giving us false information. You set up the false – and I wouldn't do it, Mr. Chair. So if someone wants to accuse me of that, go right ahead, because I would not do it. If we couldn't make an assessment based on a critical piece of information, I wasn't willing to do it and we didn't do it.

We do know that everyone in the public knows that the price of oil continued to fall. Everyone waited for stability, where is it going to bottom out. Stability never came until late January. It went down below \$30 a barrel – \$27, I guess. I think \$26, \$27 a barrel is where it went down. That didn't matter to the Members opposite when they campaigned. When they campaigned they made all kinds of promises to the people. They made all kinds. Included in those promises was they said HST is a job killer. It's not going to do anybody any good. It's a job killer. They used words like not on my watch.

Mr. Chair, not on my watch is a pretty powerful statement. Not on my watch, to me – and to many others, because people have mentioned it to me as well. Not on my watch means I give you my word. As long as I am in this position I will not let that happen.

Now that doesn't have a number of riders with it. That doesn't have enough of if, ands or buts with it. Not on my watch means I will not allow that to happen while I'm here, while I am the Premier of the province, while I'm a minister, because many of them used it. The Premier used it and many of the ministers opposite used it through social media, and they said not on my watch. HST is job killer.

Mr. Chair, HST is no longer a job killer and they put it on. I agreed with it, because we campaigned – I went to an election telling the people of the province we're putting your taxes up. When I became Premier I said we're headed to troubled waters and we have to change. We have to make a change. We went with the HST and they tore us apart. It's a terrible thing for us to do as a government to talk about increasing taxes. Now, they stand up every day here, every second or third speaker, and say how terrible we were because we reduced taxes. When we put up taxes we were the worst in the world, and they went and did it themselves. Not only did they put up taxes, Mr. Chair, not only did they increase taxes on the HST, but they increased taxes in so many other ways.

The Minister of Finance said going into the budget – now they've changed their speaking notes since then, they found it didn't work for them. They went into the budget days ahead saying this budget is going to negatively impact pretty much everybody. Everyone is going to have to take a hit on the budget. There's nothing good in here for anyone. That's how they set up their budget.

Then, of course, the HST was put back on, but it's everything else that was put back on too that's impacting people. Even the levy as it is today – which is what we're debating today – has an impact on families. Gas tax and insurance tax is having an impact on families. Increases to personal income tax is having an impact on families. Two years in a row where personal income tax was raised, because we raised it last year.

Mr. Chair, I'm going to talk about more of these things as the day goes on. Any time we hear Members opposite and we need to rectify or straighten out the information, I'll be more than happy to do it.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: Order, please!

The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just heard the Leader of the Opposition speaking, and my comments were your government was in place when Ed Martin's severance – now if he wants to say oh, it wasn't me, that's fine. He wasn't there for five years, that's fine. You weren't there. You weren't there until 2010, but I'm just glad of what he just said. He just said it was the board's decision that set it up, and he started blaming it on the Minister of Finance. That's what he just said. The Leader of the Opposition, who was the Premier, just stood up and said, well, it was the Minister of Finance. When she was on the board she set it up. It's her responsibility, not mine.

I ask the Leader of the Opposition: Why is it now all of a sudden government's responsibility? You just stood in this House and said it was the Chair of the board, they did it. Now he's been here for weeks and weeks trying to say well, government, you could have done something with it.

I couldn't believe that when he stood up and tried to pass the buck like he did on all the finances of the province, like the dome up in Nalcor, like the 12 per cent contingency fund was used up, passed that. We're not allowed to talk about that. We can't talk about that because that's the past, but the past is why we are here in the future.

When the Leader of the Opposition just got up, and I recognize he wasn't in government. I was saying his government were there, but he deflected it to the Minister of Finance. Now all of a sudden they should have known the difference. They should have stopped it, but he just stood on his feet and said it was the board that made the contract. It was the board who set it in place. Three weeks questioning; now he finally stands up and admits it.

I know the Leader the Opposition has stood up and said, well, you didn't ask for – I didn't see you stop for any projects. Well, I just want to tell him – this is one of the craws that got me, Mr. Chair, he was the premier. The Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island, the Minister of Transportation and Works, and he ought to know. I'm not saying he did know about it. I can't say he did, but he was the premier. I brought it to his attention.

Two days before the tender closed for pavement, the Minister of Transportation, two days, \$500,000 – myself and the regional manager went out. We even had it measured – even at times we had the tape out to measure the length of the guiderail that was needed because of a dangerous situation. At Plant Hill, there were a couple of accidents there the winter.

The member there took the \$500,000, two days, and put it out with Tony Cornect. He was the premier talking about how everything had to be treated fairly across the province, and he was the premier. He was the actual premier.

So, Mr. Chair, I know he wants to distance himself, but the good part about this here today is he finally admitted that it was the board that put it in place. It is the board's responsibility; all because he wanted to push it off his own government and say we had nothing to do with it. It was the board who put that in place. The board put it in place. It was the board's responsibility to execute it, Mr. Chair. I'm just glad that the Leader of the Opposition, in trying to defend himself, finally admitted to the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador that the government had nothing to do with it.

Now, Mr. Chair, he wants to talk about – the other point he just said: no, he wouldn't give them an update. No, we wouldn't give them an update. I'm glad he finally admitted that. He stood here for weeks upon weeks upon weeks, we said we gave you all the numbers, we gave you. He just stood there in his place and said he was waiting for some significant event in December. The Premier wrote him, I think it was October 27. He waited until December. I'm just glad the Leader of the Opposition just admitted that, Mr. Chair.

Everybody in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Chair, finally heard it. No, I would not give them an update. It's in Hansard. So when the Premier stood on many occasions and the Premier said we couldn't get an update, he said, well, you had it all – finally. Maybe because it's early in the morning, but finally the Leader of the Opposition, who was premier of the province, did not give an update to the people of the province – and he just stated it here in the House of Assembly. And that's why we're in the situation we're in now.

The people talking about the budget, there is absolutely no doubt there are tough measures in the budget – absolutely no doubt that there are tough measures in this budget. I can tell you, Mr. Chair, with the amount of money we're going to be spending with our federal cousins – Judy Foote and the other six MPs who are working diligently up in Ottawa. I know there's \$27 million that came down from Ottawa because of the equalization. I know this government has been in negotiations on that for a while. We said that as soon as we get funds, we would cancel this temporary levy, which we did. So we can stand up and say, oh well, you've been doing that since January – not true.

We could have been like the CETA deal, said we knew it was coming, go and make the big announcement, no deal. We couldn't make that commitment to the people of the province until we had the letter signed, and that's when that happened. That was confirmed that Tuesday night. I think it was that Thursday then there was the press conference about the temporary levy being reduced. Anybody under \$50,000 net will not pay one cent in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Chair, we talk about, well, what's good in the budget – what's good? I know I spoke to Members opposite – and I respect them. The Leader of the Opposition, I knew him for years; I respect them all. But I can tell you one thing, the \$140 million coming down that's going to be spent all around this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, about \$185 million, that's going to help a lot of places that do not have water and sewer now. It's going to help a lot of people who haven't got proper roads. It's going to put in a lot of infrastructure for investment around the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. We just talked about the money spent on the Trans-Labrador Highway – the Opposition is against it. The Third Party, against it, don't need it right now. What's the big deal?

The tunnel – sure, people can say, well, why do you put the tunnel in now? Well, it has to go in sometime if you're going to open up Labrador. Labrador is a vast land. Labrador has great tourism potential. We have to start somewhere. Sure, we get criticisms. No matter what you do you're going to be criticized, but you have to start somewhere. You have to, Mr. Chair.

I just have to say that when you go around rural Newfoundland and Labrador, one of the things we always talk about is agriculture. I say to the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands one of the things that we started when we got in – and he knew this. He probably didn't know the degree that we're doing it.

Three ministers got together probably two weeks ago. We all went off on our own ways and we said here's what we need. We're just establishing Crown land now across the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador to set aside for agriculture. That was always there.

Do you know why it was never done before? Because they couldn't get along enough, the departments, to coordinate it and say what lands are available. Out of about 400 acres – I know at least 400 or 500 acres out on the West Coast, they couldn't even get along to get a grant or lease to start agriculture.

The amount of land now that we already have identified, Mr. Chair, I'm not saying it's going to happen, what I'm going to say next. I'm not saying it's going to happen, definitely not going to say it, but our goal – five to seven years in Newfoundland and Labrador be sustainable in food.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JOYCE: That's what we're looking at, five to seven years to be sustainable because we're taking these steps. We are taking these steps. The amount of land – we're only in for six months. I know three of the ministers all went off and we came back with the land. We're putting land aside now that we know, Mr. Chair, okay, this is the land, guaranteed, that no one has a problem with, we have put aside. The Minister of Environment was there. With his knowledge and experience, it was very helpful.

Now, there's a second tier of land. We say, okay, here are some departments that have some concerns and put part of that next and say okay, we'll get rid of this; we'll move this over. There's another group and there's another group, okay, here's what we have to work on. There's another part of Crown land.

We were told at that meeting – and now, anything can happen, we don't know, climate change, anything could happen – if we put the amount of land that we have identified, Newfoundland and Labrador could be sustainable which is good for the economy, good for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Good all-around for everybody in Newfoundland and Labrador to be sustainable in five to seven years in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador in agriculture. That's forward thinking.

The other thing, Mr. Chair, I'll just wait because I'll stand up again. Another thing that we're helping is economic development. It is. It will take time, but we are taking the proper steps. I say to the people of the province I know it's tough measures in the budget. When I was out to the Great Humber Joint Council, the toughest thing they wanted us to look at was waste management.

CHAIR: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for St. John's Centre.

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

I'm happy once again to stand and speak to Bill 14, a resolution on the Liberal's levy. Mr. Chair, we've heard many words back and forth throughout the night and here we are now starting at 9:21 a.m., still Monday. It's an odd thing, isn't it? But for us here in the House of Assembly it's still Monday and we are still talking about issues that are affecting the people of the province.

People often wonder: What is the point to filibuster like this? Well, the point is, it is to be able to bring the concerns of the people to the House. The reason that we are here still debating this bill – we know that there have been modifications done to the levy, but we are talking about the overall budget and what it means for the province and what it means for the future of the province.

Mr. Chair, a number of times people have said, well, what would you do differently? I've gone through a list and I haven't completed that list, but I will do that again later today because I think it's worth repeating the different approach that we would have as a government on how we would deal with the financial crisis that we find ourselves in. Keep in mind again that budgets are all about choices and decisions. Every single line, as the Minister of Finance has reminded us because she has gone line by line by line in every department, that every single budgetary line is a choice, is a decision.

Our concern is the overarching philosophy and approach that government has taken. Now, the only goal we can see is that they are going to resort to surplus; they will return to surplus in seven years. So that would be 2023. That is an interesting goal because somebody sent a message to me and what he said is: The budget should have been about Jim and Mary from Bonavista and not entirely about Standard & Poor's. This is where I believe this government has failed. We understand how important it is to be able to borrow money at the best rate possible, but money is not an end in itself, it is a means to strengthen our people, to strengthen our communities. That's what strengthens our economy: getting people back to work. In fact what this government is doing is cutting jobs, putting people out of work.

Again, I keep referring to page 5 of the Budget Speech. People should really look at that because on page 5 of the Budget Speech, I'd like to read it, Mr. Chair. Right from the government's Budget Speech, "Beyond 2016, economic growth is expected to be curtailed by a combination of factors, including declines in capital investment as major projects move beyond peak development and the requirement for further provincial deficit reduction measures."

We know some of our major projects will have reached that point where the number of jobs that are required to bring them to completion will diminish, but also because of the requirement for further provincial deficit reduction measures. What that means is government is saying they're going to do all kinds of reduction measures to meet that goal that they have for surplus in seven years, which I believe their goal and approach is

destructive. It actually will stall our economy. It will not stimulate our economy.

Government's role is to stimulate the economy, both the private sector and the public sector, to ensure that people can get to work because that's what people want to do. People want to roll up their sleeves. They're willing to work.

So imagine, they're acknowledging the measures they are taking will curtail economic growth, when they should be doing the opposite. It's an odd thing. It really is an odd thing.

"Most main economic indicators are expected to be lower in 2021 than current levels." So they're saying: Hey, folks, it's going to be worse. By 2021, it's going to get worse. So 2021 is five years from now. Yet, their goal is not to make it better. Their goal is to get to surplus. Again, I want to remind you of this message that was sent: The Budget should have been about Jim and Mary from Bonavista, not entirely about Standard & Poor's.

"Several major economic indicators like employment and real compensation of employees will be lower by 15 per cent" – imagine this is what we have to look forward to – "and over 22 per cent respectively when compared to 2015 levels."

The only thing they can tell us – they're not telling us about any new jobs. They're not telling us about any economic diversification. They're not telling us about infrastructure they're going to do. They're telling us and warning us: It's going to get worse, folks. Because of what they feel they need to do to bring us to surplus – I'm not sure why that's the lofty goal, because that's just an accounting exercise that they are telling us it's going to be worse.

"Provincial deficit reduction measures are estimated to account for 40 to 50 per cent of predicted declines in these broad measures of economic activity." So what they're saying is we, as a government, are going to cause a decline. We're going to cause a decline in employment – there are going to be more job losses – we're going to cause a decline in economic growth – there's not going to be any economic growth – and the real compensation

for our people who are working really hard will be in decline as well. That's an odd lofty goal. The government, in fact, should be stabilizing the economy, should be projecting for economic growth.

Again, I cannot stress enough that people should read that. It's online. The budget is online. Page 5 of the budget, halfway down the page, is where government warns us that the measures they are taking will put us into decline. It's an odd thing, and that's the problem we've had with this budget. That there's no overall vision, there's no vision for growth for economic stabilization or for stimulation.

Now, I'd like to talk a little bit about austerity budgets because that's what this is. This government's budget is an austerity budget because we are in a time of economic challenges – severe. Nobody doubts that. Everybody knows that.

The Nobel laureate economist, Paul Krugman – he won the Nobel Prize for his work – said every country that introduced significant austerity has seen its economy suffer. Our government is telling us that our economy is going to suffer, and it's going to suffer because of the economic measures they are taking. All of the economic research that allegedly supported the austerity push has been discredited. So this approach that this government is taking – based on what, we don't know, on an accounting principle of going line by line in cutting, not looking at what do we need as a province to be able to thrive and strengthen our communities. All of the economic research that allegedly supported the austerity push has been discredited.

In that paragraph on page 5 of the budget, government itself is saying the measures they are taking will put us in economic decline for a number of years. I'm not sure then how that can translate into surplus in seven years when you have more and more people out of work and an aging demographic, that shift. We will have the highest percentage of seniors, we do now, and it will increase in the country. Not just in Atlantic Canada, in the country.

Economists in the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank now say that austerity budgets don't work when economies are in

recession. Our economy is in a recession, government has admitted that. We are in a recession, we know that. They're saying that austerity budgets don't work. These are international experts. They are international experts, they know this. It's based on empirical evidence.

They say you cannot cut your way to prosperity. Countries in the European Union have discovered that austerity budgets stifled and stagnated their economies. So what we have here in this budget, government itself – this government has come up with this budget. This government itself has said that this is going to stagnate our economy. Not only stagnate it, it's going to diminish it.

Provinces of Canada are also turning away from austerity budgets. So it's not just –

CHAIR (Bragg): Order, please!

I remind the Member her time is up for speaking.

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

I look forward to standing to speak to this issue again.

CHAIR: Order, please!

The Chair recognizes the Minister of Environment and Conservation.

MR. TRIMPER: Good morning or good evening or good afternoon, Sir.

I thought what I'd do is pick up on a theme that I talked about earlier, I think it was last night, it might have been early this morning, I'm not sure. I did just hear the Member opposite talk about why these decisions are being made. She made the point that it shouldn't be about Standard & Poor's, it should be about individual people. I couldn't agree more.

In fact, as I spoke last night, I'm not sure if she was here or some others perhaps, but I just wanted to repeat for a minute or two a point I was making this morning. That I really feel that

the budget, this levy, all these actions are really about the future generations.

Yesterday, I had the pleasure of being at Beachy Cove Elementary school. I was kicking off Environment Week. It was fascinating to see the enthusiasm and the innocence of Paula Courage's grade four class –

MS. ROGERS: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

(Inaudible) it is not permissible for Members to say whether someone is here or not.

CHAIR: Point of order.

MS. ROGERS: (Inaudible) so I would ask the Member to not refer to that.

CHAIR: Withdraw?

MR. TRIMPER: That's fine, I withdraw.

CHAIR: Okay.

MR. TRIMPER: That's fine, I withdraw my remark. I just wasn't sure who was here or who wasn't here. That's fine.

As I was saying, I was at Beachy Cove Elementary yesterday and it was there that I found a strong reinforcement of why we are proceeding with this temporary Deficit Reduction Levy, why we are making these tough decisions. Because, frankly, in some seven, eight to nine years from now if we were to take no action, if we were to allow the same kind of spending, the same kind of oblivious consciousness as to the debt that is being accumulated in this province, those same grade four children that I was with yesterday would be facing an amazing situation of probably \$50,000 per person as a result of the net debt that would have been built up. That's a heck of a situation.

Yesterday I saw such promise, such optimism, such enthusiasm amongst these kids. It was one of the most exciting events I've been to, I must say, since being in government. To see that innocence and then to think about the implications of what they would face when they turn 18, 19, 20 years of age, that's what I'm thinking about and that's why I feel we need to

move as we are doing. I think we need to all remember that point.

A couple of key things about the levy, the fact of the matter is – and it's been interesting watching how communications roll out around the levy. Now that I'm in politics I understand better that you really need to dive into the nuances, the details, the strategy, the rationale around all these decisions. And folks that are outside listening, watching, they are hearing snippets, they are hearing sound bites from the media and it's difficult to put that jigsaw puzzle together. What the heck is this government doing? Well, you hear one piece and you hear another piece and you say that doesn't sound right.

Well, maybe if, at the end of the day, you're thinking these statements don't sound right, maybe that's because they are not being presented properly through the media. When you have a lot of changes to make, it gets complicated because you need to act in such a way that you could catch a variety of moving parts to make sure that those most vulnerable in society are protected.

I know a lot about that, I work in Environment and Conservation, so we certainly deal with wildlife populations, making sure that they are equally protected. When it comes to the human residents of this province, we similarly had a philosophy of protecting those most vulnerable, making sure that those with the lowest taxable income would be protected.

When we first launched our budget, we had it starting at \$20,000 taxable income. Thanks to the amazing co-operation and tremendous relationship that we enjoy with Ottawa, through the seven MPs that represent our fine province, we have very much an open-door policy, open access. We are able to share with them exactly the situation that we are in. They live here, they get it, they understand it and we're able to communicate together and work together in such a way that, as you know, just some several days ago we were able to offer a tremendous benefit for many folks, such that now 74 per cent of people who file in this province will not have to pay anything towards this levy.

The other thing we've done with the levy, of course, is scale it up from that point, from

\$50,000 taxable income on up into the higher income. That other 26 per cent, there's a scaling range. Of course, some of those folks now – certainly when you're over a \$100,000 taxable income, you will be paying more, but unfortunately you're probably in the position where you can also afford that.

That's what this is about. Everybody is going to feel a little pain with this budget because of the situation. As I said, we don't want to leave the future generation a legacy of \$50,000 on each one of their heads that they're going to have to deal with on top of everything else in their life.

One of the key things about the Deficit Reduction Levy, people said levy – they stuck on that term of levy and what that meant. Of course, people just love to throw jargon or a slang statement around. We decided, consistent with our approach to being open and transparent, let's call it what it is. It's directly designed to address a burgeoning deficit that we need to approach. Other provinces have a very similar structure. They tend to mask it somewhat; they call it a health surtax. This, perhaps, clever use of jargon might fool some people but if you look at the nuance and the way it's set up, it's doing exactly as is intended here, except let's call it what it is.

It is temporary; that's a very important adjective to understand. And the way it's designed in the legislation is to ensure that as soon as we are able to make some progress on this financial challenge in front of us, we'll be very excited to get rid of that deficit levy.

I must say that with the co-operation, again, of our seven MPs from Ottawa we were able to make great progress already, even before the bill is passed. So I say thanks again to Yvonne Jones, Judy Foote, Ken McDonald, Nick Whalen, Gudie Hutchings – I'm going to forget somebody – Seamus O'Regan and –

AN HON. MEMBER: Scott Simms.

MR. TRIMPER: – Scott Simms. Thank you very much.

AN HON. MEMBER: Yvonne Jones.

MR. TRIMPER: And Yvonne – I have a lot to thank for Yvonne.

Another example of that kind of co-operation and staying on the theme of the budget – and I'm looking over at my colleagues from Labrador, they are looking nice, fresh and crisp over there – is the kind of co-operation around the most important piece of infrastructure that frankly needs to be done and completed in this province, and that is to connect our two pieces of geography.

I also happen to be the Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs. If you look at the pin the Francophone Association in Terre-Neuve et du Labrador, it's actually two sails. Those two sails represent the two pieces of geography. My colleague buddy from Torngat Mountains is proudly wearing it (inaudible). People will wonder what that means.

Anyway, it's those two pieces of geography represented by those two sails. It's frankly the Trans-Labrador Highway that's going to help up connect our province together. It's the feasibility study that the Minister of Transportation and Works has so eloquently supported and gone forward with in his very tough economic situation. These two initiatives themselves, once completed, once we understand this is real nation building, this is how you actually diversify the economy, let's bring this province together – because the Trans-Labrador Highway is not a regional highway. It's not just a convenient little connection to a group of people. It is how Newfoundland is going to access goods and services through Central Canada.

I can tell you my colleagues from Lab West, from Torngat Mountains and from Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair, we all realize and understand and we are starting to see, as the highway makes progress – I'll give some good credit to the previous administration in terms of progress on that great highway – Phase III, there is big progress. We're going to keep up with that, thanks to the co-operation of our federal MP colleagues. I look forward to finishing this.

Another point that people need to understand around infrastructure and what's going on is that when you're trying to connect two pieces of

geography, as we are, until they are connected, you're not connected. So you could have a four-lane or six-lane highway but if you can't get across the Strait of Belle Isle in an effective, efficient way, you still haven't connected Labrador to the Island. So it might as well be one of Donald Trump's walls, frankly, until you can get this overcome.

I'm looking forward to the results of the feasibility study. I feel this money will be very well spent. It is a tough situation and you'd certainly love to have pockets of this money to use all over the place, but do you know what? This is all about looking to the future. It's looking towards those kids in that grade four class of Paula Courage's Beachy Cove Elementary that I had so much fun yesterday. We're going to make sure they have a province they're going to be proud of. We're going to make sure they're not burdened with a huge debt. We're going to make sure they've got a bright future and I'm very glad to be part of that team.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: Order, please!

The Chair recognizes the Member for Ferryland.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm glad to stand and have a few thoughts in regard to Bill 14. We will continue on with debate on Bill 14. I certainly listened intently to the Minister of Environment and Conservation and his thoughts, from a government perspective, and what's he's doing. He referenced taking no action, but we've heard this consistently at times in the debate. Everybody recognizes any government as they come in is not going to take no action and they try and project what would have been if no action was taken.

We all know that when any government comes in they're going to take action dealing with specifics that they're dealing with in a fiscal situation. Much like we did last year when we brought in *Budget 2015* and put measures in place to look at the results of these declining

revenues and some of the challenges we face. Nobody is going to take no action; they're going to lay out a plan, hopefully, on how to deal with our current financial situation.

He also indicated a little pain. Well, in some cases with this levy and the number of measures that have been implemented by this government, in many cases there's a lot of pain. There's a lot of pain for ordinary Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, certainly for middle-class families, young families raising their kids, paying mortgages, paying for their vehicles, engaging their children in recreational activities, having to pay for that, and all of that. All of these fees and levies that have been introduced significantly impact those families.

I know first-hand, as we all do in our district, we've heard from various families and members of the community. I've known, just particular middle-class families, as I said. Two people working in the household, a couple of kids, as I said, paying mortgages, paying for vehicles, activities for their children, maybe attending post-secondary. So all of that is significant in regard to what children do and what the requirements are.

That impacts, any time there's a reduction in net income and what people have. It plays significant, certainly on the family. We just think – this is not a little pain, it's a lot of pain. That's the problem with this budget. It's gone too far and taking too much out of people's pockets, and the plan forward is not clear. That's the biggest issue with this budget, and it's highlighted by this levy and what it represents.

Another component of the budget I want to talk about for a few minutes, Mr. Chair, is related to education and some of the things we've seen in regard to the decisions that have been made. I want to relate it back to my district and members in my district I've spoken to.

One of them relates to the busing change in regard to a couple of million dollars that projecting may be saved through reduction of busing service. My understanding is contracts are coming up and have to be renegotiated, and through the reduction in bus servicing we're going to have savings. Because of this, the administration in the English school district has

changed the route and routine for many areas, particularly in my area.

I've heard from parents, met with parents' groups from Bay Bulls to Bauline in regard to the Witless Bay-Mobile School system and the significant changes it's going to have. I met with a concerned parent's group, a lot of emails, a lot of phone calls. I presented a petition here with several hundred names dealing with that and looking for changes. As well, for the region in the Goulds, Petty Harbour-Maddox Cove, into the Goulds, that region there, in regard to Gould's Elementary, the junior high and high school. All those are interrelated in regard to bus service and how important it is. I'll speak to that in a second.

I had a group of concerned parents in last week, spoke to them and listened to their concerns. As well, I presented a petition here in the House of close to 500 names in regard to looking and calling upon the Minister of Education and certainly the English school district to revisit this, to consult with the school councils, with the parent community. One of the big concerns they have is there was no consultation done here, this was sort of downloaded and they got a notice that this was all changing.

Just to put it into perspective, Mr. Chair, from our very youngest getting on a bus an hour earlier, getting off school possibly an hour earlier and the integration of care for kids is dramatically affected by that. Particular cases where a younger child now may go to a bus stop an hour earlier, getting off earlier, that child may have been cared for by an older sibling. So they got them through until mom or dad got home in the evening. That's dramatic changes in regard to the function of that family unit. What do they do now?

In any case, if you have to introduce new home care, ways to care for those children, that's extra dollars that's paid by that family. Whether it's a single mom, whether it's a middle-class family, those are extra dollars that has to be paid for by that family, which is significant. So what we're seeing here is a download of – even with all the fees and taxes we have to pay, we're seeing a download of services which means it's dollars coming out of that family's pocket. So where a child maybe had the ability to be cared for by an

older sibling at two, now there need to be extra dollars to see that child through, which is significant.

We've asked the Eastern school district to review this and to have some insight into what the actual outcome of this decision is and have them reassess it, but it's been challenging to get them to do that. We are calling on the government and the minister to intervene here and to be reasonable in terms of how we can work through this so the needs of the parents and the whole community in general can be met. Particularly for those two regions I talked about, from Bay Bulls to Bauline and the two schools K to six at St. Bernard's, seven to 12 in Mobile, and as well in the Goulds region, the three schools there as well.

I just want to share an email from many emails I got in regard to the issue, just to give it a realistic view from a parent that's raising their family, as I said, and dealing with the challenge. This lady says – a concerned parent: Below is a note I sent to the principal and vice-principal of Goulds Elementary last night. Perhaps this is an issue, one you can address. I imagine everything going on with the school – time changes and busing – you're overwhelmed with emails and phone calls. These issues need to be addressed. This is not something that can be let go. Children's safety has to be number one. That safety piece deals with younger kids on the road walking to school stops and so forth earlier in the morning, dangerous.

Goulds is a very busy area with busy streets and many cars commuting to and from their areas for each and every day. In my case, I have no other child care for my son. My mom lives on the Main Road across from Fourth Pond which is apparently 3.5 kilometres from the school and there's no busing.

My son has received a courtesy seat for the past couple of years, along with my older son who is now in grade six at St. Kevin's Junior High. Both myself and my husband commute out to the Goulds every day to St. John's, so some commute back and forth. They have a schedule now in regard to busing service that allows their children to get safely to and from school, but what's been inflicted here basically throws that apart.

They leave about 7:30 in the morning. The other issue is the courtesy seating. Inside the 1.6 kilometres close to a school, if there was a bus travelling and there was a seat available on that bus, a child could apply. If there was a seat available they could access it. In this particular case, based on the current numbers, they can access it. We know if they're reducing the number of buses, you're reducing the number of seats. It's very unlikely that a courtesy seat is going to be available for this child.

Here you see the traumatic effect this move is going to have on this family and this child. The parents are left to determine how they get their child to school. Both of them commute back and forth to St. John's at a particular time. So now they're left with a young child, approximately 40, 45 minute walk for the child to get to the school. It's a serious issue.

Again, when I've met with parents and spoke to them on the phone, gotten emails and all those kinds of things, their frustration has been in regard to the budget decision and how this was inflicted on the parents and on the community in that regard and that there was no consultation. Why are we doing this when you look at – apparently this is a couple of million dollars and we're not sure when buses are tendered and contracts held, that's all going to come out, yet this is an arbitrary decision that's been made.

As I said, the cost associated with this in implications is further dollars, outside of the levy, the fees, the taxes and everything else they're expected to pay, this is going to be downloaded and because of that there's extra care, they're going to have to pay right out of their pockets, like I said, over and above the levy, all the taxes and everything else we've seen that's going to come out of their pockets again, which is increased cost for this middle-class family trying to raise their family here in Newfoundland and Labrador. It's just another disincentive for them.

Mr. Chair, I thank you for the time. There are others I have that I'll certainly look forward to discussing later today.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR (Warr): The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's certainly an honour for me to stand again and to speak in this House. As I said on a number of occasions throughout this session, it is indeed an honour for me to represent my people and to be elected to represent the people. I take great pride in doing that, Mr. Chair.

I'm actually surprising myself this morning because I'm a person who needs a certain number of hours of sleep, but if I waver off into some area that I shouldn't be leaning, maybe you can bring me back to order.

Again, as I said before, this is an interesting exercise. Obviously, the Opposition felt it in the best interest of the people of the province to filibuster this bill, in spite of the fact that we made significant changes to the levy. As I mentioned on numerous occasions, this is a very difficult budget that we've brought down because we were facing unprecedented debt in this province, a debt that we have not been used to.

We've always had, over the years, Mr. Chair, a degree of debt but the problem with it is that over the last number of years the amount of debt has been escalating, it was getting higher, and unless there are some measures taken, Mr. Chair, it's impossible for us to have a sustainable future that will be based on borrowing and borrowing and borrowing.

Mr. Chair, last night, or somewhere when I spoke, I referenced the fact that if this particular budget goes unchecked, if, in fact, this particular government that was elected to represent the people made no changes, if we accepted the status quo, I think I was very clear in stating that by the end of this mandate, we will be facing debt servicing charges on interest close to \$2 billion a year. Now, can you imagine?

I know it's been a late night. I know it's early into the next day and I don't ask too many Members to sit back and take a moment to think about this because you might all fall asleep. Just think about it, if we had \$2 billion that we could use for services, we would not have to worry

about some of the measures that we've had to take. We would not have to worry about some of the cuts that we've had to take. That would not be a problem because we will have enough revenue to be able to offset that so that we could provide the services that the people of this province deserve I say, Mr. Chair – they deserve.

However, when you're faced with the challenges that we're faced with – and these are challenges, these are challenging times – we just do not have the revenue stream to be able to offset the expenses. You see, Mr. Chair, it's impossible for us and for any government to continue to operate on a basis that the gap between your expenses and your revenue continues to grow. It is absolutely impossible. We cannot be sustainable.

You cannot have expenses at this level and you have revenue at this level. That's not sustainable, Mr. Chair. We cannot survive on that. You have to take measures. We have to narrow the gap between expenses and revenue in order to provide the services that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador deserve. It can't be done by status quo. It can't be done by not changing the tax structure. It can't be done by continuing to provide every single service that we've been used to providing. It cannot be done, Mr. Chair.

We are placed in this unfortunate situation that we have to clean up this mess. It's unfortunate that someone has to do it, Mr. Chair, but we have been elected to do that. It's important for us to realize and to be cognizant of the fact that we cannot continue in the future in the course that we're going. We can't do it. It is not sustainable. So we're left with the situation that we have to make tough decisions, decisions that none of us wanted to be in the position to make. It is not something that we take glory in. It's not something we're proud of. How can we? We have to face the consequences.

We would have had to have blinders on if we didn't realize that there are people who are going to be impacted by this, but if you were to go out and ask any Newfoundlanders and Labradorians: Would you like to have taxes raised? Guess what the answer would be. No. Would you like to have services cut? No. Well if

you can't do any of those things, we are on the brink of bankruptcy.

We talk about bond ratings. The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre made a comment about bond ratings. She may not think bond ratings are important. They are important. They are crucial. If our rating was lower, if we're talking about \$950 million now for interest and our bond rating was lowered, guess what would happen. I don't have to preach to the converted on this side to realize if our bond ratings went down, our interest rates would increase, the amount of interest we would be paying would increase and we would be in a worse condition than we are now. Mr. Chair, bond ratings are important for us. They're crucial.

We have to take measures. We have to make sure that we are being responsible to the people of the province. We are being responsible to our young people. We can't be kicking the can down the street. We cannot be kicking all these expenses. We cannot be kicking all this debt onto our children and our grandchildren. It has to stop. We cannot continue that. It's an area that we have not been used to in our life.

This is the first time in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador that we are paying more in interest than we are for the education of our children. I have to grandchildren in this province, and I am ashamed of that. It's totally unacceptable. The quicker we understand that's what we're doing to our younger people, that's what we're doing to our grandchildren, I think people will have a different view.

We have to take measures. I am tired of living in a situation where we're passing along, passing it down to our children, passing it down to our grandchildren. It has to stop because if not, they have no future. I mentioned to the Member for St. John's Centre, grandchildren are important to me – very important to me. The future for my grandchildren is very important for me. That's why I've worked in this province for years, to provide a future for my children, provide a future for my grandchildren. I want them to have a future.

It's not a future of debt; it's a future of hope. We have to instill hope within the people in this province if we expect to have a province going

forward, Mr. Chair. We cannot live in the past, although the past is determining our present right now. Our past is determining part of our future; that's why we're in the position we're in. So we have to be cognizant of that fact that we are here because of mistakes that have been made, because of spending that has taken place, because we have not checked and we have not made sure that when we are in good times that we look forward to and we prepare for times when we're in not so good situations.

Mr. Chair, that's where we are today, and I want to make sure that we have a sustainable future for this Province.

CHAIR: Order, please!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's a pleasure to stand once again and speak to Bill 14. This is the bill relating to the levy, but it all ties into the budget, so I guess that's why we're seeing a lot of commentary about the budget in general. This filibuster is not about this bill; it is about the budget in general and the cumulative effect and all the other measures that are here.

Mr. Chair, I just want to correct a couple of points that were made earlier by the Minister of Municipal Affairs. Not to be critical at all, I just want to clarify, actually. The first thing the minister raised was the fact that I have people in my district that are above that \$50,000 threshold. I did say it. That's true. I have a lot of people above that threshold, so somehow I don't care about people below that threshold.

I just want to say that if that's what the minister thinks, that is certainly not true. I have a lot of people in my district as well that are below \$50,000 and I've said numerous times, I've stood up here numerous times not just like last

night and today but other times we were debating the budget and different parts of the budget, I've been quite clear, I'm glad – it's a good-news announcement. I've acknowledged that even before the federal government worked out a deal with the provincial government, I have acknowledged numerous times that there were measures in place to deal with low-income seniors and I applauded that.

That there were measures taken in this budget – I don't know what the amount of money is; \$74 million maybe – I think that's the number – invested and basically seniors that are low-income, fixed-income seniors that many of them are going to be better off than what they were before. The seniors' supplement and the home heat rebate are being replaced with an enhanced seniors' supplement. Based on what I've seen and my understanding, those seniors, the low-income ones, are going to be actually better off. That's a good thing.

I have said that. I've acknowledged it. I just want to acknowledge it again because in case someone is misinterpreting what I'm saying, that is a good thing. I applaud the government for doing that; that is good. The fact that the federal government came across with a deal to defer money owing them until 2022 – I believe that's the date – so that it frees up that cash to be able to raise the cap to \$50,000 on the levy, that's a good thing. I've said that over and over again. That is a good thing. I acknowledge it. I thank Minister Foote and all the MPs and the Premier and anyone else who had any involvement in making that happen. I've acknowledged it. It's a good thing.

So I just wanted to make that point. Now, does that mean, though, that because those good things happened that I'm supposed to ignore the rest of the people in my district? No. I do have a lot of people in my district that are making above \$50,000. I have a lot of nurses, RNC officers, teachers, professionals, people working on the offshore, IT people, whatever, that make higher incomes than that. So just because we are doing something good for the other group, which I acknowledge and I think is great, it doesn't mean I'm going to ignore the fact that I have a lot of people who are not benefiting from it. So that's all I've said. I think it is important to

say that again because maybe I'm being misunderstood somehow.

The other point that was raised by the Minister of Municipal – and I give him full marks for this one as well because it's the first time I've heard of it and it's a good-news story. The minister is saying that they're freeing up Crown land to do agriculture so that we will be sustainable because we know that we have issues, have had it for a long time, with food security in this province.

We know what happens when the boat can't get across. We've seen it happen here where we've had bad weather or breakdowns, whatever, and the ferry couldn't get across. Dominion, Sobeys and these places are emptied out; there's like nothing left on the shelves after a few days. We know we depend on that and so it's important that we have food security, that we be self-sustainable when it comes to agriculture and so on.

I think it should be the same not just for vegetables and stuff like that, but I think also for – I don't know if that's part of the plan, but like if it's livestock, dairy, slaughtering our own beef and pork and all that kind of stuff. I know one of the issues around that is having federal inspection in order to process the beef. That was always a deterrent for some reason, I don't know why it was, but I was told it was a deterrent.

If there's a plan in place to do all that it's a good thing. Absolutely, 100 per cent full marks. Excellent, I applaud it. I absolutely do. It's good to know that those things are happening because those things need to happen. For some reason, for years they didn't happen. Now I don't know why they didn't happen. I can't speak to that, but they didn't happen. If they're going to happen it's a good thing. I know the minister has said that he can't commit that in five years it's going to be there – I understand that – or seven years or whatever it was, but if we're working towards it, that's a positive thing.

Those were just a couple of points that I just wanted to clarify and to say that everything is not – and the minister also mentioned the water and sewer. My understanding is – and the minister can correct me if I'm wrong, I think the number is \$20 million. No?

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. LANE: Pardon?

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. LANE: Okay, but there was money that was put to leverage 30-cent dollars from the federal government or something. There's federal money and we're going to put in so much provincial money, we get back a lot more federal money.

MR. JOYCE: Twenty million dollars for the first phase.

MR. LANE: Okay, \$20 million for the first phase. That's going to leverage a lot more money and we're going to be able to do a lot of water and sewer and all that kind of stuff.

That's good, that's excellent. I support that, absolutely. Sure, why wouldn't I support something like that? That's good. In this day and age people should have water and sewer, clean drinking water and sewer. Absolutely, they should – absolutely.

So I just want to make the point that while there are parts of the budget that we have concerns about and we've raised and our constituents have raised – and we all know we all have different needs. There are things that are going to be common to everybody and then there are things that are going to be relevant to urban parts of the province versus rural parts of the province. There are unique circumstances around geography, isolated areas, needs for ferries, infrastructure, and all that kind of stuff. There are going to be differences, we know that; but, at the end of the day, I think there's a lot of good stuff here too.

So I just want to put it out there that if it's coming across as being all negative, it's not all negative, but we have to point out the concerns that our constituents have. That's part of what we have to do in Opposition. Whether you're in Opposition or you're not in Opposition, if your constituents have concerns, if there are things that are going to negatively impact them, you have to fight for them. That's what you're elected to do.

As I said, there are concerns. We've raised it. We all understand about the taxation. Everybody expected it, everybody is willing to pay a share, and pay a fair share; but, at the end of the day, people feel that it's just gone too far, too fast. We've heard that over and over again: too far, too fast. And the cumulative impact of all of this is the issue.

I just say to the Members opposite, please, don't think that I'm condemning everything in this budget because I'm not – absolutely not. Mount Pearl will get its share of multi-year – I don't know if it's in this budget or they got it last year, but Mount Pearl gets its multi-year capital and St. John's gets its multi-year capital for roads and stuff like that. As far as I know, that's continuing on. I have no complaints about that. That's all good. I'm glad that the rural areas are getting money and stuff to do projects there, and that's good.

There's no doubt that all this water and sewer work and roadwork is going to create employment. Now, I would argue that – I'm not sure I would call it economic diversification. I'm not sure if I would call it that. It is work getting done. It's going to create jobs and so on. That's all good. That's a positive. I'm not knocking it. It's a positive, but I don't know if it's a long-term strategy for economic diversification.

The agriculture piece absolutely is. That's economic diversification. It is fulfilling a need we have and hopefully it's for the long term. That's good stuff and I acknowledge it.

I'm going to take my seat now and we'll have many times to stand again, but I did want to put it out that while we're critical of certain aspects of the budget, I acknowledge that not everything in this is bad. There's good stuff here too.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. PARSLEY: Good day, Mr. Chair.

To rise in this House is an honour any day, but it's an honour especially today to talk about the

bill that we've been debating now since yesterday. It's a very important bill, but listening to my colleagues here and the Members on the other side, I realize the state of our province, the state that we have been left in.

The hon. Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands just talked about clean drinking water. As a municipal leader, I understand what that is because, for years, I have fought for the people of my wonderful district, Harbour Main, for clean drinking water, water and sewer and things that people have to survive on. We just don't turn on a tap out in some of our rural areas and expect to have water systems that are on par with the rest of the country.

As a mayor, I sometimes had people show up to my house with drinking water that was so brown in a glass, clothes destroyed because of the fact that we didn't have the proper system; but because of the things that are going on in this budget today, we are hoping to be able to improve these through our municipal – the best, best ever that ever happened in the history of this province due to Municipal Affairs.

Our transportation, roads, we just can't ignore that. People in rural areas live different. This is no disrespect against people in the city, but we live different. We get up in the morning, things are based on, our days, how are we going to survive today? I have seen water shut off 3½ to four days and if people don't have clean drinking water, what do they do?

Mr. Chair, I heard the Member for Cape St. Francis say there are some Members on the other side who haven't said much. Well maybe he was referring to me because I am one of these Members. Do you know what? I'm in a state of awe. I came into this House in December. I came in here with a vision and my vision was to work with this government to put ourselves back on track, and to be on track means to have money, to have money for our children, our grandchildren, so that they can go to school, they can go to ballet classes, they can do hockey; but the state that we were left in, we are lucky to be surviving.

To sit here through this night and this morning to debate this, it is utter ridiculous for the simple reason that Members on the other side know

what's going on. They know full clear what's going on. In order to be in an economical condition that we need to be in, we had to take these measures. In order to survive, the province had to take a stand. And if it meant our taxes are up a bit, our insurance went up – everything has gone up, yes, but what happens if everything went down and we stayed the same? In 3½ to four years, we would be paying triple the interest that we're paying right now, and that's not fair.

That's not fair to the people of this province because our forefathers went to war and they fought and when they came back, they came back to the province that they were proud of. And considering that we're celebrating the 100th anniversary this year of Beaumont-Hamel, the morning that they went out, went over, and when the roll call was done, and the few that returned came back to a proud province, a province that had people who believed in work. They didn't have bank accounts. They had nothing. They lived off the land, but do you know what? As a result of that we became proud Newfoundlanders and, yes, everybody might want to pack up their bags and leave and go to Edmonton, or elsewhere, but the conditions there are just as bad and worse.

I have a sister who lives in Edmonton. Try selling a house there right now, it's brutal. I was there in late fall; things are not great. You hear people huddled around in coffee shops like Tim Hortons and Starbucks; it's the same as here. When the oil dropped, they were affected just like we were affected. The only problem is we couldn't live off the dream of having oil forever. We have to have other economic developments.

I was out last week to Cupids, one of my beautiful, beautiful districts, its tourism – we have to pick up on other things. The money that's being given for tourism right now, it's phenomenal. Holyrood, another beautiful place; Brigus, it's unbelievable what is going on. Tourism rates are up; people are calling.

I had a former career in the travel industry and let me tell you after spending 25 years in it, coming out and looking at what we're into now – yes, people need to go on vacation, but people also have to realize in order to put this province back where we need it, we have to become responsible.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. PARSLEY: And in order to be responsible, we all know what it is – I know what it is to raise a family. I have two children that we adopted with disabilities and I know what it is to get up every morning and face that, and that's a harder choice. This budget will come and go, but people who deal with mental illness and deal with disabilities, that will never go. After 4½ to five years, when all of this goes, maybe six or seven, we're all back on a playing streak, but families who are raising this and go through it don't know until you go through it.

I ask today to just realize that this bill is a very important bill. Do you know why? We need leaders, not runners. When times are tough, we have to be tough. We have to stand by this government and do what we were elected here to do. The people made a decision in December and the decision was for us to run this province. Let me tell you, when we opened this mess and this can of worms crawled out, there was no way we could put them back because they crawled and we're in such a mess.

As my times winds down, I would just like to say that I'm going to speak now for a minute on the levy. I think I have about 3½ to four minutes. I'm not great on time, but I'm standing here. It's been a long time.

With the suspension of the payments under the Equalization Repayable Floor Loan, the provincial government has made changes to the temporary levy; 74 per cent of tax filers in our province will pay no temporary levy. The provincial government is increasing thresholds to \$50,000, meaning a number of people will not have to pay the temporary Deficit Reduction Levy which will increase; therefore, tax filers will not pay.

Those with taxable incomes between \$20,000 and \$100,000 can expect to pay less. For example, a person with a taxable income of \$55,000 will pay \$100 in the annual levy. While someone with a taxable income of \$100,000 will pay \$700. Someone with a taxable income of \$625,000 will pay a levy of \$1,800.

We are a government that inherited an unprecedented deficit unlike any other

government has seen in history. In cleaning up the PC mess, we have to make difficult decisions, while also protecting the most vulnerable. These changes to the temporary levy further demonstrate our commitment to doing that.

The gas tax, I have to speak on that for a minute. It's been said and said again in this House, as the oil revenues come up, there will be changes. It's a temporary gas tax. It's not written in stone. Something that's not written in stone can be changed.

I ask the people of this province to bear with us right now while we're in this temporary mess because we will come out on top. One day, we will look back and say: We did it. We stood firm and we're going to get through it because if we don't, we're doomed. The Province of Newfoundland doesn't need to be doomed. It's a wonderful province – its people, wherever you go, we're known for so many things in this Newfoundland: friendliness; people love to come to Newfoundland for the simple reason because of its people. And its people need to have some pride, it needs to be able to move on now and not to be worrying, not to be fear mongered into what's going on, enjoy your summer, try to move on and realize that life is short. We can't be living in fear. If we live in fear, we live in nothing.

So I ask you today to realize that this government has taken some tough measurements, but at the end of the day it will come, it will get better and, hopefully, a lot of us will be around to see it.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Topsail – Paradise.

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

Thank you very much. The debate on Bill 14 continues now into the mid-morning of Monday, the day after Monday but it's still Monday as I talked about earlier. It's still Monday. It is, Mr. Chair. In the parliamentary day, you ask the Table Officers there and they'll give you wise

advice and wisdom. I'm sure they'll tell you it's still Monday, as much as they feel like it's Friday but it's still Monday.

Mr. Chair, earlier I had a chance to get up and speak to Bill 14 probably an hour ago or so. There are a number of speakers who have gotten up since then. While I'm quite tempted to speak to some of the comments by Members opposite, I'm going to resist the temptation and stick to my own plan and information that I want to share. I'm going to do that, Mr. Chair, because I was talking earlier about some of the changes in positions that we've seen with this government. We've seen a number of changes in positions since back when they jumped from the election to now.

There were a number of things during the election campaign; I talked earlier about HST and how they campaigned on the fact that it was a job killer. They used words like: not on my watch. It was not going to be on my watch. Not on my watch is what the Premier said, and I have a copy of it here somewhere. I'll look for that now momentarily.

I also talked about attrition. There'll be no job losses and there'll be no layoffs. Our commitment is no job losses. The words used in some of those are: Public sector jobs are safe. Under a new Liberal government they said the public sector jobs are safe. Cutting jobs is not part of our plan. Also there was another graphic used by one of the current ministers who was campaigning at the time and said Liberals are committed to no job cuts in the public service – quote, unquote.

It was actually a tweet by the now Minister of Natural Resources in an advertisement that was used by the Minister of Natural Resources that said Liberals are committed to no job cuts in the public service. They are significant statements and people take people at their word. Mr. Chair, people take them at their word. When someone says not on my watch, we're committed to it, it is not going to happen while I'm here, job killer, growth killer, those types of things, then people take them at their word. That's one of the problems and that's the shift in the discussion that has happened publicly.

People talked earlier about when the budget was coming and I talked about this a little bit earlier, the Finance Minister set it up and said this budget is going to be a negative impact on everybody. It is going to have an impact on everybody's lives and really people went, oh my goodness. There is nothing good going to happen here. What's going to happen in the budget?

Then when the budget came out, we saw why because there was so many increases in costs and fees and taxes and so on, even though they campaigned on – actually what the logo said or the advertisement for the Premier said the Tory HST hike is a job killer and a growth killer, not on my watch, even though they campaigned on that.

No job losses, layoffs – P3 was another one. The temporary Deficit Reduction Levy – I'll shorten that to a Liberal levy. When they brought in the levy, the Premier said there would be no changes. There is going to be no changes whatsoever in what we are doing to do in the levy.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. P. DAVIS: Oh, yes, you said what the budget is, the budget is; that's what we are voting on. Then only a few weeks after, they announced changes on their stance with the impromptu announcement with the members of the federal government that they've relieved the province of a loan repayment for a five-year period – to use their words – to kick the can down the road for five years. They don't have to start paying it back until 2022 and then the Liberal government made an announcement to the levy.

Someone said to me, Mr. Chair – and I'll tell you what they said. It is not something I'd probably use myself but they said it is kind of like a loan shark saying to you I'm going to break both your legs and say, no, I'm going to break one of your legs and now you should thank me for that. That's what happened with the levy. They changed the levy. When they changed the levy from total destruction to half destruction that is what someone said to me. He said it is like a loan shark says I'm going to break both your legs and then afterwards says,

no, I'm going to break one and you should thank me. That was the comparison that person meant when they it said to me.

The Premier made a commitment he going to release the justice report. Really interesting on the justice report because the Department of Justice was asked to investigate the appropriateness of the severance given to the former CEO; they were asked to investigate.

Members opposite, the Premier, the Minister of Justice, Minister of Natural Resources, Minister of Finance, all knew that the Premier's office was involved in this. They had asked the Department of Justice to investigate the appropriateness of the severance, which really means they're actually investigating the actions of Cabinet ministers and Premier, those involved, the Premier's office and so on.

The Premier said – one day he said nine times, I want the information out there; we're going to release everything. Nine times in Question Period one day last week he said, yes, we're going to release it. Nine times he said it. Now when he came out he said we're going to give it all to the AG and we're not going to release it.

Then the Auditor General said that's not going to interfere with what I'm doing, that's not going to influence me. I'm not going to be influenced by it; I'm just going to look at the facts. Then the Premier said, I want to get it out as quickly as I can and we're going to do that. Then actually directed the minister then to release certain information that they felt was going to benefit them, some emails that were released on April 20 which clearly identified that the Premier was quite aware that the board was meeting, had paused and was deliberating over severance for the outgoing CEO and took no action.

We learned through that process, it was April 20 that they actually knew. Then the Premier very cutely says, I didn't know the details until May 5. Premier, when did you find out there was severance? I found out the details on May 5. So when you ask over and over and over when did you find out the severance, and he continued to say we found out the details on May 5, it leads one to believe he didn't know anything about it

until May 5 when we know actually it was April 20 that happened.

Then he says, okay, I'm going to release all the Justice reports. Then he says he's not because it's going to the AG. When the AG said it's not going to be an interference he said, yes, I will. Then yesterday, the Minister of Justice got up and said this is subject to solicitor-client privilege and we're not going to release it.

Now that's really interesting, Mr. Chair, because they've asked Justice to do an investigation. The Minister of Justice himself is on the record of talking about internal investigations. He was talking about police, and police should not investigate themselves. There should be independent oversight in investigating internally of police. He's talked about having a separate branch, something like Nova Scotia or Alberta has. There's some merit in that. I'd like to see what the process is. We look forward to seeing what it is he's planning. Hopefully, it will be a good one.

In this case, they said we've given it to the Department of Justice to investigate – solicitors and lawyers at the Department of Justice. Now, they're saying it's subject to solicitor-client privilege. So what had happened was they've asked their own solicitors, their own legal advisors to investigate the appropriateness is now what it appears to be, which makes no sense of why they asked the Department of Justice to investigate in the first place.

Why did it take so long, about three weeks, between the Department of Justice being involved before they say we're not going to release the report? I'm sure the Minister of Justice's lawyer would have known and be quite – he sounds and appears to be very knowledgeable in solicitor-client privilege. Why did it take so long, and all of a sudden we're not going to release this report because it's subject to solicitor-client privilege. So that's another change we've seen.

These are examples, Mr. Chair, of why people today in the province, when the Premier or minister says something, people go: Yeah, right, sure it is. We'll find out something different tomorrow or next week, or I wonder when we'll get the whole truth on it. That's the problem

that's happened now in the province, and that's a loss of confidence that people have in the government when they don't trust the government. They don't trust what they say. They don't trust what they're doing. They're saying, well, once they stand up and say something, how do we know that's right?

When there are so many changes in position, there are so many changes in the comments and speaking that they've done and continue to do up to yesterday. Three major issues yesterday came to light here in the House of Assembly that caused concern for people, and of course made the headlines, and the news were very interested, because the people of the province are very interested – three matters.

I have several pages of examples and notes that I've got here, and I'm just still on the first page of examples of when we said one thing and did something else. When they made a commitment to do something, they did something different, or they made a commitment and stood here in the House and said I'm going to do one thing when they didn't do it, or not going to do it, or changed their position or have changed it in the past.

So, Mr. Chair, I look forward to a further chance to debate. My 10 minutes is up, and I look forward to listening to speakers as they follow as I take my seat.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. JOYCE: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm just going to stand for a few minutes and speak – I attentively listened to the Leader of the Opposition talking about the severance for Ed Martin. We know it's a lightning rod for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Leader of the Opposition is pushing that button.

I said earlier, and I say again, Mr. Chair, I ask the people in Newfoundland and Labrador, where were the questions asked of Nalcor? Where were the questions when the dome was going up and down and cost us millions upon millions upon millions? Where were the

questions asked to Nalcor? Where were they asked to Nalcor, Mr. Chair, when the cost was rising and rising and rising? Where were all those questions?

He was the Premier, he was in Cabinet. So all of a sudden he wants everybody in this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador to fixate on this million dollars. The costs gone to Nalcor this year – the Leader of the Opposition doesn't want to talk about this – the costs gone to Nalcor this year is \$1.3 billion – billion.

AN HON. MEMBER: That's with a B right?

MR. JOYCE: That's with a B.

All of a sudden, forget about the billions that it's costing us now, forget about the cost overruns, forget about his government. He was premier when this minister right here stood up, the Minister of Natural Resources, Derrick Daley, was standing up and saying: nah, Astaldi is paying for the dome. Don't worry about it. We have no cost overruns. We have a 12 per cent contingency fund; nah, don't worry about it.

Billions overrun; billions that it's costing right now, Mr. Chair. Here is the Leader of the Opposition now who thinks, well, here we are, we have an opportunity now because there is a severance paid out and people are upset with the budget and everything else. I can tell you, if that Leader of the Opposition, when he was premier of the province, when he was in Cabinet, if he had to ask the tough questions, a lot of these problems wouldn't be here today. Guess what? They didn't ask the tough questions. They didn't push the button.

Do you know what they did, Mr. Chair? They started writing blank cheques. Blank cheques, what do you need? Here's what you need to solve this problem, go ahead. What do you need?

It's like a house, Mr. Chair, if you have a house and the foundation is gone, you can put whatever you like around the house, until you fix the foundation that house will always find a way to sway, always have leaks, always have cracks. That's what this Premier and this Minister of Finance had to do. We had to go

down and get to the root of the problem of Muskrat Falls.

We had to find out why every year there was a deficit, and the deficit was going up on the cost of Muskrat Falls. We had to find out every year. Every year we asked questions – I was over there. We asked questions every year. How much will it cost? When will it be producing power? We were told everything is on schedule.

In the last year or so when the Leader of the Opposition wants to talk about a million dollars – \$1.3 billion gone over this year and asking questions. Well, there's a bit of pressure on labour. Yes, there's a better cost on the cost. We have a 12 per cent contingency fund. Mr. Chair, I asked those questions about the contingency fund. Do you know what I was told? It's all gone – gone, boom, wiped out.

Those questions weren't asked. They weren't asked, Mr. Chair. So I give the Leader of the Opposition credit for trying to fixate on a million dollars to Ed Martin because it's a lightning rod to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, but I can tell you one thing: the Premier and the Minister of Finance, if they were in that boat three or four years ago with Nalcor and the board, Mr. Chair, they would have asked the tough questions. They would have been asking these questions. Why do we constantly have to write blank cheques from the people of the province to put into Nalcor, to put into Muskrat Falls – constantly?

What is the cost of Muskrat Falls? No one knows. No one knows the true cost. When will you produce power? No one knows. We were told 2017. That's off. That's gone. No one asked that question. What's the cost going to be? Anybody can stand up on the opposite side – ever asked Nalcor what's the final cost going to be? Here's your opportunity, I'll sit down.

They never asked those types of questions. All they would do is go out and have a press conference, oh, we're having stresses. We're having a bit of stress on labour; we're getting a bit of pressure on materials. That's what the people of the province were told for years, Mr. Chair. Now, all of a sudden, we're faced with a mess. We're faced with an absolute financial mess in the province. All of a sudden the Leader

of the Opposition, all he can talk about is the million-dollar bonus. That's what he could talk about.

I just find it alarming that the big issue in this province was never ever addressed. The big issue right now is Muskrat Falls, the money that's going in from taxpayers of this province. We always heard the Opposition, Mr. Chair – always heard going to bring in billions. We're going to bring in billions of dollars. Who's going to bring in the billions? It's the taxpayers.

I'm so glad that this government made a commitment that any excess power that we sell over Nova Scotia on the spot market or however we sell it – in Nova Scotia if it's on the spot market, or make a deal with Nova Scotia – that money will come back and subsidize and help with the rates in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. There will be major, major increases of electricity in the province when Muskrat Falls come on stream. I said it when I was in Opposition and I'm saying it again, that's why the tough questions weren't asked. That is why we're in a financial mess right now. This is why these measures that we had to take are hard on a lot of people of the province. They are.

There are a lot of good things in the budget, Mr. Chair – a lot of good things. I'm just going to speak about the District of Humber – Bay of Islands for a few minutes. I'll look at Lark Harbour; for years, no water and sewer. I have to give the former minister credit; he tried with amalgamation. The Member for Ferryland, I have to give him credit, he tried with that. I will acknowledge that, but they have no water.

So with this major infrastructure program that's coming in now with the federal government – and people that know as much as I did and I know the Member for Grand Bank, Judy Foote, and I know the other MPs here, they came through. They went up and said okay, what's the best thing we can do to help stimulate the economy?

I say to the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands when you were mentioning about water and sewer infrastructure and economic diversification, I'll just explain to you in some ways how it helps a lot. There are a lot of business can't open now in rural Newfoundland

because they have no water and sewer. They don't have the infrastructure.

Once you put the infrastructure in, they build around it. I know the Member for Ferryland, we've been chatting about some places that need water and sewer so businesses can expand. This is the economic diversification that when you put in – I always remember the day when Clyde Wells said we don't create the jobs, but we can create the environment for the jobs.

With this major influx of economic development through water and sewer, capital works through the roads program, this is going to give rural Newfoundland a lot better opportunity to create employment, to create business, to expand on their current business. This is part of the economic development.

I agree, there is going to be spinoff through the jobs. When you spend \$180 million in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, there are going to be spinoffs. There is going to be a lot of work in the next two years in Newfoundland and Labrador construction industry – a lot. That's not counting the infrastructure from Transportation and Works; this is just water and sewer and roads that this is going to create.

Can you imagine the people out in Lark Harbour now – one of the greatest tourists areas in Newfoundland and Labrador – if they could put water and sewer in and then we are working on the Internet also – it is a big issue. The tourism in that area – the highest mountains in Newfoundland and Labrador are in Lewis Hills.

This is how we are looking at creating economic stimulation in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. I know the Member wasn't being facetious when he said that but I just explained how it happens, and that is why it is so important to have this economic plan.

I look on the North Shore. Over on the North Shore, for years, we have been trying to get sewer up in certain areas of Summerside, Irishtown, McIvers and other places. Hopefully – and there is absolutely no guarantees. And I know every Member on this side has pushed for their district – every Member. I know every Member on that side has spoken to it, and I give

everybody credit. This is the way we have to work together. There is no knocking that because I did it to the former minister. I lobbied him. I sat down and spoke to him. I have no problem with us working together, but this is what this economic plan is going to do.

I can tell you we were dealt a bad hand, but I guarantee you one thing we'll find a way to get through this. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are resilient –

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: They understand and, Mr. Chair, I thank them for being patient.

CHAIR: I remind the hon. minister that his speaking has expired.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

It's an honour to be rising here in the House again and bring the people's voice to the floor of the House of Assembly regarding all aspects of *Budget 2016* and in particular this levy, Mr. Chair. Which the people have clearly spoken and have clearly expressed their complete and total dissatisfaction with this budget and with this government as a whole.

One of the things I wanted to talk about – and there's so much you hear as everyone gets up. Despite the fact that we're in a filibuster, which God knows how long it will go on, there are still not enough hours in the day to be able to cover all the ground that you really would like to in 10-minute intervals, Mr. Chair.

One of the buzzwords that I have noticed in the Liberal messaging is the word "unprecedented." It's been a word they've been including in all of their press releases and their speeches. They're throwing it out as one of their buzzwords.

What I would say to that, Mr. Chair, is the only thing unprecedented so far with this government

is the incredible disappointment and such a fast disillusionment of the electorate based on what they thought they were voting for versus what they actually got. I tell you that drop, that disillusionment and that disappointment is something unprecedented. I've never seen it before in my 40 years observing politics here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

One of the Members opposite, when they got up to speak today, talked about how government has to become responsible. To that, Mr. Chair, I would agree. In their media or in their spin messaging that they are preparing, they talk about spending and how we got here because it's a spending problem. Some people do acknowledge the global oil crisis and what's really happening in the world, but they also talk about spending.

If you agree, Mr. Chair, and if you truly believe that spending is a problem, why is your government increasing spending this year by \$400 million? So you say it on the one hand you have to become responsible, the question I ask to that: Is taxing the working poor to a point of poverty responsible? I think not. Is complaining about spending on one hand and then on the other hand, right here in this House of Assembly, right here with this very budget you're increasing day-to-day operational expenditures with things like full-day kindergarten, is that responsible? I think not. If you're going to talk about spending, then deal with that side of the equation, which they have not.

Clearly, what this budget is, is a tax the people budget, but there is no method whatsoever to address spending. What I would say to that, Mr. Chair, is if you are serious about it – because we all know we can't take them at their word, that's the one thing that has clearly been proven over and over again by their actions over the last six months and continuing today – bring in legislation.

If you want me to believe you're not going to crank up the spending when the oil comes back, then the only way I'd believe it is to see it in writing. To see the legislation that says when money does come back there will be no increase in expenditures or spending. That's the only way

I'm going to believe that, Mr. Chair, if you're saying that spending is the actual problem.

So let's go back to the word unprecedented again and how that's being tossed about here in the House. I have a document – and everyone is available to go and look at it online. It's at rbc.com and it's under economics in their economic reports.

This here is a list, Mr. Chair, that I have and I will read into the record the net debt to GDP ratio. This is a history and, of course, I believe this to be a very credible source, RBC. There's no political spin messaging here. These are actual facts, actual numbers of what has really happened in Canada across all the 10 provinces. The data they have here, Mr. Chair, is recorded since 1981.

Let's take a look at the debt to GDP ratio for Newfoundland and Labrador. Back in 1980, that debt to GDP ratio was 38.9. Then we see in 1988, the Liberals came into power, 37.3. Then we watch what happens going into the early '90s, the next few years, 38.2, 40.4 and 40.1.

Now, in 1992-93, Mr. Chair, the debt to GDP ratio for Newfoundland and Labrador was 65.3 per cent. We haven't hit that right here today. Then in 1994, 65.7; 1995, 65.6; 1997, 68.1 per cent of net debt to GDP ratio.

Then, Mr. Chair, in 1998-99, at the height of the Liberal era, 69.6 per cent; almost 70 per cent debt to GDP ratio by a Liberal government. I truly believe, given the austerity measures of this budget, given the recession of our economy, that is no doubt going to follow because of the austerity measures, I'm worried that's where we're going back to. We're not seeing any movement by them whatsoever with respect to the spending side of the equation.

So we'll keep on looking. They record the numbers right on up through. You see 2009-2010, debt to GDP ratio for the province is 32.9. Then it actually starts to lower: 2010-2011, 28.4, 23.4; 2012-2013, 26.1; 2013, 26.0; 2014-2015 – and we start to see the impacts of oil here – 30.8 per cent; 2016-2017, 41.9 per cent – the Liberals are back in power – 2017-2018, a forecast of 49.4 per cent.

If we're going to raise the bar in politics, if we're going to bring politics to a higher standard then let's keep the debate at an educated level and let's be honest. Let's forget about the spin. Let's forget about the politics of attack. Doom and gloom. Yes, our message is doom and gloom. We have to do this because of doom and gloom.

What is that doom and gloom messaging doing to the psyche of the people? What is that doom and gloom messaging doing to the business investor who is maybe looking at Newfoundland and Labrador? Because of politics, you're going to communicate to the world a message of doom and gloom?

There is no doom and gloom in Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Chair. There are rough times. There are challenges. Like many jurisdictions across the world are experiencing, but there is also great potential here, Mr. Chair. There is fabulous skill sets. We have intelligent people. We have skill sets that can undertake megaprojects anywhere in the world because of the investments and the learning and the experiences of our people, starting way back when to the hydro development of the '60s. Those skills have carried on.

I know, speaking for my region alone, there are people who worked with McNamara on the building of the original hydro facility in Labrador. Then they came to Bay d'Espoir and worked on the hydro facility there. They followed McNamara all across the country and around the world because of their skill sets and enjoyed a wonderful life of prosperity.

That is the type of people we have to offer the world. It is the type of expertise we have in our people. I truly do believe there is potential for Newfoundland and Labrador. It does bring me great joy when I hear Members opposite stand up and speak about the positive aspects of our economy because we do have a lot to be proud of, Mr. Chair. I truly hope as we move forward, if this government is truly going to be responsible, that we'll see them revisit some of this austerity they have in their budget.

Again, I'll go back to the levy, which is the bill we're debating. I could be wrong, and I stand to be corrected on this by the minister or Members

opposite, but let's say roughly the levy generates about \$130 million, \$140 million a year. This year you're only going to generate half of that because you're not imposing it until July. Half of \$130 million is \$65 million. Well, guess where we can find \$65 million? Elimination of full-day kindergarten and elimination of that contingency slush fund in the budget. Right there you can eliminate the levy for 2015-2016. Then reassess it next year and see where we are with oil prices.

I'm quickly out of time. So I can't get into much debate on the price of oil and the projections of the dollar but maybe in my next 10 minutes I'll get a chance to speak on that, Mr. Chair.

Thank you so much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

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

I certainly feel compelled to stand in this House and respond to some of the comments the Members from the Opposition have been sharing as we debate the temporary deficit levy.

I understand, Mr. Chair, and those watching at home certainly are aware that this is a money bill. What that does is it provides an opportunity for all of us in this House, whether in Opposition or whether in government, to speak to anything related to the finances of the province.

Mr. Chair, I think I have a responsibility to stand and correct some of the factually incorrect items that have been shared by the Members of the Opposition. I'm quite stunned that the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune stood up a couple of minutes ago, just sat down maybe a minute ago, and spoke about the temporary deficit levy. We've been debating this since April 14, and the Member opposite still is unable to remember or make note about the exact annualized revenue for the temporary deficit levy.

Now in the context of the emotion around the budget, that may not seem like a very important

miss but in the context of this debate that has been going on for a very long period of time, and a very important debate for the people of the province, I want to clarify for the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune that the annualized amount for the deficit levy is \$61 million. I'll certainly leave it to the Minister of Early Childhood Education to clarify her inaccuracy around the implementation of full-day kindergarten, which I think she actually alluded to was going to also cost \$61 million, Mr. Chair.

The other item I'd like to – before I get into some of the other comments, is that she referenced the fact that you can't believe it until you see it when it comes to government making commitments around taxes. As I said when we opened the debate in committee around this piece of legislation, Bill 14, the legislation – for those people at home and for those people who are in the gallery today in this hon. House – has an end date for the temporary deficit levy. You really can't get much clearer than legislating an end date for a tax. The only other way to make it not temporary would be to come back into this House and change that legislation. So I certainly would remind the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune that in the legislation, as I'm sure she's been briefed on, there is clearly a date there that indicates the deficit levy would be reduced.

Mr. Chair, I also heard the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune educate this House of Assembly on her interpretation of information that she reported on the province's net debt per capita. Well, Mr. Chair, I have here – and I'm certainly prepared to table this for the Member of the House. One of the things I found very helpful in continuing to provide information to the Members opposite is to be giving them the information so that they have it, so then they can speak to it accurately.

We will have the highest net debt and currently have the highest net debt of all provinces in 2015-16. Mr. Chair, we've had discussions in this House over the last number of days, and there are Members of this House – the Member for St. John's Centre likes to continue to talk about the comparison between Newfoundland and Labrador and Alberta. Based on the information that has been provided by the provincial public accounts and budget

documents, and compiled by the Fiscal Policy Division of the Department of Finance, the net debt per capita for Alberta is one of the lowest in Canada; conversely, ours is one of the highest.

And for the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune to talk about this budget as having an impact on increasing the net debt per capita, quite frankly, Mr. Chair, I'm baffled. I don't know how she could make that assumption based on a historical read of net debt. Maybe somebody didn't explain it to her. Maybe somebody who researched for the Official Opposition didn't provide her with the right information. Anything is possible, and we certainly see that happening. People do make mistakes and then we, as Members in this House, have to stand up and be accountable for those mistakes when we have a chance to speak here.

I would only assume that the Member was provided inaccurate information, but to say that this budget was going to increase the net debt per capita, I'm baffled. I don't know where she would get that impression.

Mr. Chair, earlier today the Leader of the Official Opposition spoke about a number of things that he believed was – he presented them as facts that were true. There was one small point that I wanted just to clarify. I know that he's an hon. gentleman and he'll certainly appreciate the information I'm sharing and I know he's aware of this. He mentioned that he had some concerns and he didn't believe that we had introduced the temporary deficit levy initially and had said it was temporary.

From my recollection of reading the Budget Speech and from my recollection of the discussions we had from April 14 to now, it's always been discussed as temporary. So when the Member opposite allude to or suggest that he didn't have clarity on that or somehow somebody changed the direction on that, I would suggest that maybe again the information being shared with him isn't accurate.

Mr. Chair, the other thing I'd like to bring up in the last couple of minutes, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Service NL spoke quite eloquently here this House earlier about the types of questions that – as elected officials, as

MHAs, as Cabinet Members, as Premier and as the Leader of the Opposition would know – have to be asked to make sure that the little bit of money that we do have to provide services to the people of the province is stewarded in the right way.

One of the questions that were quite stunning to me was around public accounts. As the people of the province – certainly in this hon. House – know the public accounts is something that when the fiscal year-end finishes, there has to be a disclosure to the people of the province, a transparent disclosure of the finances.

One of the questions I would ask, which would follow along the questions that the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Service NL suggested earlier – one of the questions that I would ask the Members of the Opposition is, where were the public accounts? Where were the public accounts from fiscal '14-'15? When did they, in fact, get released to the people of the province?

Mr. Chair, I understand the answer because I was actually the minister responsible for signing off and releasing those documents. I am sure the former premier, the former deputy premier, the former Cabinet ministers that sit in the Opposition side now, I would ask, in parallel to the questions they were asking, or dare I say, not asking, about the issues related to the Muskrat Falls Project, where were their questions on the public accounts?

Mr. Chair, before I finish and sit down, I recognize and our government recognizes that this budget and the decisions we've made have an impact on everybody in the province. I said it before the budget, and I acknowledge it and I recognize it. We understand this is difficult budget, and our province is in a very difficult situation. We have an unprecedented fiscal situation. We have a future that is ripe with opportunities, but until we get our fiscal house in order as a government, the ability for us to continue to work to grow our economy and do the things that we all know, collectively, all 40 of us in this House know that we need to do, we can't do it, because we would be putting the critical services of the province at risk. Critical services like health care, critical services like education.

Before I sit down, Mr. Chair, I think we need to remind ourselves again that we are paying more on debt expense – that’s not the principal for the debt – than we are paying to educate our children. That’s why we had to take some of the action we took in this budget.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for St. John’s Centre.

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

I’m again very happy and honoured to stand and to speak again to Bill 14 on the Liberal levy. I would like to start off with a good-news story, Mr. Chair, but a good-news story that comes out of bad news. Perhaps people in the House have heard, or maybe not because we’ve been in the House all night here, that both our local writers Michael Crummey and Janet McNaughton have been named winners of the 2016 Newfoundland and Labrador Book Awards. How wonderful is that? That’s pretty exciting.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. ROGERS: Michael Crummey won the award in the fiction category for his novel, *Sweetland*. It’s a beautiful book. I read it a few months ago and I was absolutely enthralled. Michael, in his work, just so beautifully captures the heart and the soul of our glorious Newfoundland and Labrador. Michael was a poet before he wrote longer form narratives, and as a poet you can see that every word is so measured, that he has such a way of turning a phrase and painting pictures for us with few words. His writing is so incredibly powerful.

Then Janet McNaughton won the Bruneau Family Foundation Children’s/Young Adult Literature Award for *Flames and Ashes: The Great Fire Diary of Triffie Winsor*. Janet has won a number of awards for her writing for young adolescents. Again, work that inspires people, that also captures the heart of Newfoundland and Labrador.

So their awards were presented yesterday at Government House. Now, the interesting thing is that both Michael Crummey and Janet

McNaughton each received \$1,500 for their awards, while the runners up, Sara Tilley – again another fine Newfoundland writer – Joan Clark, also won for fiction; and Charis Cotter and Susan MacDonald for children’s/young adult literature. Each received \$500.

Now, Charis has written a few books for young adults, as has Susan MacDonald, who happens to be a palliative care doctor and teaches at the MUN Medical School. Sara Tilley is a clown and a director and has written a number of books, and also has won a number of awards. I believe Sara may have won the Winterset Award this year for her book. Joan Clark, of course, has written a number of books – two of which are being made into films.

So the Newfoundland and Labrador book awards are a joint presentation of the Literary Arts Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Writers’ Alliance of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Now, this is not where the story ends, Mr. Chair. In fact, what Michael Crummey has done – and again, Michael, who won the award in the fiction category for his novel, *Sweetland*, did one of the sweetest, sweetest actions by donating his cash prize of \$1,500 to the Buchans library. He did so because that Buchans library, which is at the heart of the community of Buchans, that is so used by the community of Buchans, is slated to be closed. The funding for that library has been withdrawn.

This is how much the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador care about their libraries. This is how much the people of the province are willing to do their part for this economic crisis. I am sure that every Member in this House today would like to applaud Michael Crummey for this incredibly generous compassionate and passionate action by donating his award to the Buchans library.

It shouldn’t have to be this way. It doesn’t have to be this way, and what we do know is that every bit, every single element of the budget that we are debating is about a choice. The Minister of Finance knows that. She made a choice. Everything is deliberate and calculated. The choice was to close these libraries, even though they are used by the community. In some

communities, they are the heart of community gatherings. A writer like Michael Crummey can see that. Imagine donating his award. We know that our writers are not flush with cash. They're absolutely not flush with cash, as is the story with most of our artists and people who are working in the cultural industries.

Earlier in the middle of the night, I spoke about the Economic Recovery Commission and what Doug House wrote. He was with the Economic Recovery Commission for Newfoundland and Labrador from 1989 to 1996. This is a quote from him when he wrote about the commission: "The economy does not operate in isolation. Successful economic development depends on successful social development and sound and environmental management. Education and training, employment programs, social-security reforms, transportation and communications, infrastructure development – all need to be coordinated and integrated so as to contribute to economic development ... At the regional level, this should be done through the leadership of the twenty regional economic development boards" We know what happened to those regional economic development boards known as the RED boards.

Mr. Chair, when I hear the Minister of Finance speak, all she keeps saying is how desperate the financial situation is and that she had to do this, how desperate she was, but we've not yet once heard her talk about her vision for the province. She's guaranteeing us that we're going to be in surplus in seven years, but the evidence is contrary to that because we can see soaring unemployment.

This budget does nothing to increase employment. As a matter of fact, again, on page 5 of their budget they're warning us that unemployment is going to increase. That's not economic development. It certainly isn't. We know part of our – this government is still stuck in a boom-and-bust cycle of megaprojects. I guess they're waiting for oil to rebound because there is nothing else in this budget that points to a new source of revenue, aside from picking people's pockets.

So, Mr. Chair, I beg this government to stand up and tell us what it's going to be like now in a year from now. What is our province going to be

like? We know that she's talking about reducing the debt and reducing the deficit, but I got another message from a constituent who said the budget should have been about Jim and Mary from Bonavista and not entirely about Standard & Poor's.

We know how important it is for the province to be able to borrow. We all know that. We know how important it is to borrow as economically as possible, but what is our province going to look like in three years from now? This government hasn't told us that, except what they have told us are that we're going to be in economic decline because a number of our major projects will move beyond peak development; we know that the provincial deficit is going to increase, and we know that people's earning powers will decrease as well. So that's all that we know.

We don't have a plan for economic diversification. We don't have a plan for rebounding. All that we have a plan for is reaching surplus in seven years, but what does that mean? Will our people be better educated? Will our people be healthier? Will our educational institutions, particularly MUN which should be fostered so that it becomes a centre of excellence in so many areas, will that be strengthened? No. All we know of is the cutting and the cutting and cutting.

Again, as Doug House said in the Economy Recovery Commission the economy does not operate in isolation. Successful economic development depends on successful social development and sound environmental management. Education and training; this is what the government has cut; employment programs, this is what government has cut; social-security reforms, government has cut there; transportation and communication, they haven't done anything about that; and infrastructure development, they have cut that by over \$100 million.

So they have done the antithesis of what needs to be done to develop a strong, healthy, vibrant province with its people so we can weather the storm. Mr. Chair, it is lamentable.

I look forward to standing again to speaking to this issue.

Thank you very much.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Stephenville – Port au Port.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FINN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Before I even get started here, because we are talking about Bill 14, the levy, I just need to correct the Member for St. John's Centre specific with reference to social security reform. I'm not sure where you're saying we cut. I believe we introduced something called the Newfoundland and Labrador Income Supplement Benefit. So where did we cut income support measures, I ask? Stand up and tell me where we cut income support.

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

MS. ROGERS: I would like to reiterate the answer for the Member. What we talked about here is social security reforms. It's not income support. So where were they cut? When we look at the over-the-counter drugs, when we look at health care, when we look at the cancellation of the adult dental program. There are a number of reforms like that, Mr. Chair, that in fact have been cut. We can go to more –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

CHAIR: Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: Social security reforms, Mr. Chair, are not simply about income support. That's a small part of it. We know we haven't seen an increase in income support in a while but social security reforms are the programs that help people thrive, are the social safety nets that we have. It's not just about people on income support. It's about all these issues. It's about child care. It's about all those supports that help people get to work and to thrive.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Stephenville – Port au Port.

MR. FINN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the Member for St. John's Centre for clarifying, because I did ask specifically where we cut income support and she didn't acknowledge that because we actually didn't. So therefore we did increase measures for individuals in receipt of income support as a result of this budget.

That actually brings me to a good point as well because the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune also referenced the fact that we're taxing the working poor and taxing the working poor to death. Here we are talking about Bill 14, the temporary Deficit Reduction Levy. Anyone who has less than \$50,000 of taxable income will not pay this. I don't know what your definition of working poor is. We could float anywhere from somebody making \$10 an hour right up to \$18 an hour, because what I can tell you is that Bill 14, the temporary Deficit Reduction Levy, will not affect anybody until they make at least \$28 an hour.

If you want to go back and find the definition around working poor, I'd love to hear it. Again, we're talking about a bill that 74 per cent of the people in this province will not pay; 74 per cent of the people in this province will not pay this. You talk about unprecedented, and you said all the government Members are saying this is an unprecedented time. It is. The definition of unprecedented is never known or done before.

On Thursday of last week in this House, we did something that was extremely unprecedented when we put the loan act in to borrow \$3.4 billion, the highest amount in our province's history.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. FINN: Three point four billion dollars of borrowing is what we discussed last Thursday.

MR. JOYCE: How much?

MR. FINN: Three point four billion dollars, I tell the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Last evening as we began some of this debate, I believe I spoke at around 7 p.m. or 8 p.m., I'm not quite sure now at 11:15 here this morning. After I spoke, the Member for Conception Bay South got up and said: That Member spoke quite

well. I'm glad he fired me up because I'd love to know whoever prepared his speech with figures around the levy and how he cherry-picked his comments.

I'd love to table my document. I can promise the Member for CBS – I'm glad he's here listening – I can promise him this is a document that I printed off and the mathematics of such I calculated myself.

First of all, no one prepared the document for me. Secondly, I didn't cherry-pick any comments. All I did was proceed to quote how much income someone makes, what that equates to in dollars per hour and what that will equate to with respect to your cheque. I'll reference it once again to put things in context as we're talking about Bill 14.

We're not talking about, as the Member for Mount Pearl North did last night, vaping for 10 minutes. We're not talking about, as the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune just talked about, the debt to GDP ratio of the 1990s. The price of a barrel of oil in 1998 was like \$10 or \$15. I challenge you to find one year in the '90s when it struck above \$40.

We budgeted a budget right now on \$40 a barrel. Don't go back to the 1990s because we're picking on a few things you did a few years ago. Don't go back to the 1990s. It's completely different economic times.

AN HON. MEMBER: Irrelevant.

MR. FINN: Completely irrelevant to the conversation. The conversation right now is on Bill 14, the temporary Deficit Reduction Levy. Choose to speak about something else if you wish – \$51,000 a year to \$56,000 a year taxable income. Not gross, taxable income.

For the sake of taxable income, let's just throw in some things that you may deduct from your gross income. So before you can achieve taxable income you have some basic minimal deductions. They're going to include your union dues, any professional fees you may pay, Northern tax allowance, child care benefits, so on and so forth. Every circumstance is going to be a little bit different, but for the sake of – let's just take a gross figure and say about \$53,000. If

you can find \$2,000 in deductions, you'll be down to about \$51,000.

So someone making \$51,000, roughly, again, \$28 to \$30 an hour. I'd wager to guess there are many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who would like to make \$28 to \$30 an hour. The average amount that you'll lose per cheque as a result of the temporary Deficit Reduction Levy is \$3.85 per pay period which roughly equates to a little over \$7 a month.

I'm going to fast forward to the higher end of this as we now narrow down the figures. Let's get up to \$81,000 or \$80,000, anywhere in there. The highest end of that particular levy is going to equate to \$23 per pay period. That's just putting it in context. I'm not saying it's right, I'm not saying it's something we're proud of; \$23 can do a lot of things for people.

I had a great conversation last week with a friend of mine. He wanted to know exactly how this was going to impact him. A good friend of mine, a master social worker who works with individuals of mental health and addictions. He's making somewhere in the vicinity of \$70,000 to \$75,000 a year. I explained to him that the Deficit Reduction Levy is going to equate to about roughly \$20 a paycheque.

Do you know what he said to me? He said, well, that's probably close to my gym pass for the month, but I'll figure it out. Just putting it into context – and I'm not suggesting that everybody is going to be that flexible in adjusting. There are other measures as well that coincide with this and there's an adjustment that people need to make.

I quoted those measures last night as well. I might as well do it again. We brought the tax levels in this province back to where we were in 2006 and 2007. In 2007, we took the highest income earners and dropped them 3 per cent over a period of four years. We've not only added back on that 3 per cent, we've tacked on another 2 per cent. Now, the highest income earners in our province will pay levels that they paid in 2001.

Our lowest income earners did not see a change over that period. We're bringing them back in 2017 to the same place for personal income tax

that they were – these are the lowest earners in the province – 8.7 per cent, exactly what it was in 2007. Then everybody is going to move to Nova Scotia, aren't they. They're all going to move to Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and PEI.

Any taxable income up to \$60,000, our province's personal income tax levels – we are less than Nova Scotia. We are less than PEI. With exception to two income brackets, New Brunswick is just a little bit different. We are competitive across Atlantic Canada. Our Atlantic Canadian counterparts are increasing their HST the fall and we'll be in line with the rest of them as well.

So I'm just a little lost as to where – we get carried away on the conversation. We're here talking about the temporary Deficit Reduction Levy.

Furthermore, to think about all the economic indicators that pointed to where we are right now, I think some of your own reports, the former administration's government reports, will reference that. We can see that come 2016-17-18 things were going to start coming offline. This was no hidden secret. Predicting the price of a barrel of oil, sure, is a difficult task at hand, but peak oil was not something that was unimaginable.

I did a course at Cape Breton University in 2007. The course was called The Politics of Petroleum and Natural Resources. At that time, it was well referenced that we were to be expecting peak oil. So to think that was just a gone thought, I have a hard time swallowing.

I want to conclude – I just have a minute or two here – just to put in perspective the Leader of the NDP and some of the things he had to say last year and looking into the fall and looking into our budget. Mr. Earle McCurdy's on the record saying, quote, I think it would be irresponsible for anyone to say I'm running for office this fall, I'm not interested in looking at the revenue side of the ledger whatsoever, not willing to consider any increases in fees or taxes whatsoever. He was clearly thinking about it.

Further, he said in November in an interview with the CBC: Too much debt ends up shackling us with debt-servicing costs. Spot on there.

We'll switch to the former premier in December – this is December 2014, and I got a few of them here. I'm going to save a few for later on; we might be here a while. He says: I say, Mr. Speaker, to you, and I say to the Members of the House of Assembly, that would be the easy thing to do. Let's continue to provide all the services that people want, we'll respond to all their requests and all their demands. We will drive up the debt.

Do you want to increase taxes to pay those costs? No, I do not want to do that. So the only other alternative then is to drive up the debt – and that's the easy thing for a government to do. It most certainly is an easy thing to do; we're not prepared to do that. We've taken some difficult measures. They have not been easy. We have acknowledged that. They are temporary measures. It speaks volumes to the fact the first time we had an opportunity to change that levy we did, hence the word, temporary.

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. FINN: The Minister of Finance has referenced it in the legislation. It is a temporary measure.

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. FINN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs.

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I see no one on the opposite side was going to rise, so I just decided to get up and have a few words, Mr. Chair. I was here again today listening to some of the speeches. Once again I just want to rise and I ask the Opposition, as I did before on many occasions – of course they are always saying, well, we have this terrible budget in. Mr. Chair, when the government took over and we took power on December 15, we were faced with a very serious financial crisis – absolutely, no doubt about it.

Mr. Chair, I asked the Leader of the Opposition this morning, who was the premier at the time, I

asked him on three occasions to stand up. He is harping on this thing, this lightning rod about Ed Martin and his severance, and I asked the questions – and I know the Opposition House Leader is sitting there. How many questions did he ask Nalcor at the time? How many questions did he ask about the \$1.3 billion that we have to put into Nalcor this year? A lot of is the cost overruns to Muskrat Falls.

He will not answer those questions. Why were they just writing blank cheques to say, oh, we have pressures? Mr. Chair, it's a major flaw. All of sudden now we're questioned, how can you allow this severance go through? How can you let this million dollars go through, when we had to write a \$1.3 billion cheque to Nalcor this year, with most of it going to Muskrat Falls for the cost overruns? How many questions did they ask when the minister of Natural Resources stood in his seat and said Astaldi is paying for the dome, they are paying for the dome to put it up and take it down – how many questions did they ask to ensure that the public would know Astaldi was paying for it?

What evidence did they ever produce? But now all of a sudden, Mr. Chair, we are harping on this thing, oh, this government are making bad decisions. The decisions were made when they refused to do the responsibility as a government to ask the tough questions.

When they didn't ask the tough questions, what happened was they had to write the blank cheques because they wouldn't handle the problems that we are faced with. The problems that we are facing with Nalcor and Muskrat Falls on December 15 never happened on December 15. It just didn't happen on December 15.

They started back when the project was announced. We said it when they bypassed the Public Utilities Board, the PUB, when the bypassed that and then they started – we had the Decision Gate 1, Decision Gate 2, Decision Gate 3, all the numbers all lined up, they didn't ask the tough questions.

I can assure you that right now, Mr. Chair, and the Member for St. John's Centre is agreeing with me, that's why we stood in this House and we couldn't support Muskrat Falls. Now, all of a sudden, this government here who is faced with

the financial crisis, we're the ones who have to make the tough decisions.

I can tell you one thing, Mr. Chair, the Minister of Finance and the Premier asked the tough questions of Nalcor. We asked the tough questions about Muskrat Falls and we got them. We got the tough answers and it doesn't look pretty. It just doesn't look pretty.

Mr. Chair, \$1.3 billion into it this year. Just think about \$1.3 billion this year. We were told December 14, before, everything is fine and everything on schedule. A few pressures, everything is fine. Imagine if we had that \$1.3 billion.

MR. LETTO: A few pressure points.

MR. JOYCE: A few pressure points.

MR. LETTO: Yes.

MR. JOYCE: The Member for Lab West says and we heard that. Imagine if we had that \$1.3 billion now to put into the budget. Just think about that, Mr. Chair. December 15 is when we sat down and said, okay, let's look at Muskrat Falls. Let's see what information was being passed along to the people of the province. Let's see how true it all is.

Mr. Chair, we were astonished. There's a 12 per cent contingency fund that we were told in the House. The premier stood on his own feet, the Member who stood right there, the minister of Natural Resources, who I have a lot of credit for and I have a lot of time for – he's a great guy, absolutely no doubt; he was a good guy. Derrick Dalley is a great guy; I have a lot of respect for the guy. When the information was being put out to the general public, we have to say was it information that was just handed to him and passed along or did they dig into it. I know now they did not ask the tough questions.

So the Premier and the Minister of Finance, Mr. Chair, are taking the heat because of the inaction from that government. We're wearing it. I have no problem with it. I understand there are a lot of people who are upset, a lot of people who are saying they're going to lose in the gas for example.

The levy, 74 per cent now won't pay one cent of the levy – not one penny. We understand that. I understand that. I explained it to the people as the best of my ability and a lot of people understand.

I stood in this House and I said I was at the Greater Humber Joint Council. I know the Member for Cape St. Francis always says go back to your districts. I was there with all the joint councils, Mr. Chair, on Saturday. There's a piece in the paper today. Do you know the questions they were asking? Their biggest concern is the cost of waste management and how much that's going to cost the municipalities, which is going to be passed down to every household. That was the big issue. That was the big concern about waste management. That's not here in this budget, that's not here in this House of Assembly, but they know because this government, again, did not ask the tough questions, just writing blank cheques, just letting everything move on.

I stood in this House of Assembly, Mr. Chair, in the government's own report for waste management in Western Newfoundland and Labrador, they said in order to agree to go to Norris Arm, they would need a \$1.8 million subsidy. That is what it is going to cost just to truck it over. Guess what? They just said no, we don't want the subsidy. That's what happened. That's exactly what happened.

Now, what's happening, they're realizing the rates are going up. They realize it. It's still not in place. There's going to be extra expenses that are going to be passed down to the people of the province, but we can't talk about that because we have to talk about is the levy. That's all we have to talk about, 24 per cent of the people – and I understand people being frustrated.

I mentioned earlier, Mr. Chair, I'm talking about municipal affairs and the money that is going to be spent. When you're in the vicinity of about \$160 million or \$170 million, there's going to be a lot of communities with a lot of work who never had the ability to do it before. There's going to be a lot of work – there is. Again, I applaud the federal ministers for it and I know the discussions with all of the MHAs on both sides that everybody tried their best to put their priorities in to help improve the towns and,

hopefully, that would create economic development.

I'll just speak about Humber – Bay of Islands. Do I hear about the concerns of the budget in the Bay of Islands? Yes, but I can tell you one thing, I hear the people say what choice did you have. Are some people are a bit dismayed with the levy? Yes. Are so many now? Absolutely not. They are saying – as I said – once we get an opportunity to do the decrease, or eliminate the levy, we will.

I just look and Cox's Cove is getting some water. I spoke to the Member again, the Member for Ferryland was the minister, one project was announced there last year with that. Mr. Chair, there's a part of McIvers that needs sewer. They still haven't got proper sewer. There are parts in Irishtown and Summerside that haven't got proper sewer, haven't even got proper drinking water, still a boil order advisory. It's a large town.

Lark Harbour, for example, has no water or sewer. In this day and age, have no water and sewer. So hopefully, with this influx of federal, provincial and municipal funds – when I talk about this large, huge fund that's the three levels and everybody is chipping in. Then when you look at Route 440 and 450, those two routes have been neglected the last eight or 10 years – have been neglected.

So am I proud of the budget? There are good things in the budget, and there are some things that we'll work on. It's a working budget. We said that as soon the Minister of Finance brought it in. There are a lot of good things in the budget. There are some things in the budget that is going to help a lot of municipalities in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Before I sit down, I just have to say, if I was ever proud of government, it was the Premier and the Minister of Finance because they started asking tough questions. You can't deal with a solution –

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: – until you find out the problem. They found the problem, Mr. Chair –

CHAIR: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: – and it was Muskrat Falls. We need major decisions on Muskrat Falls.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It certainly is a pleasure to stand once again and speak to Bill 14. Mr. Chair, it's amazing, we talked about earlier how social media works these days. We're continuing to get people following this debate, live, and then they're tweeting their comments or Facebook messaging their comments and questions and so on. I have a couple of comments I want to read, just to get it into the record, because people have asked, and I have a couple of questions to ask on behalf to other people.

Before I do, though, I just want to comment on what was said by the Member for – I apologize now – Stephenville – Port au Port. I should remember the districts, but they've changed. Anyway, the Member for Stephenville – Port au Port was talking about the fact that we are debating the Deficit Reduction Levy and why are we talking about all these other things, this is the bill we're debating. I just want to say that the reason why we're talking about everything is because it's not about the levy. I don't know how many times we've said it's not about the levy; it's about the cumulative impact of all of the changes at the one time. That's what it is.

When we're talking about other things, that's why, and that's what people are telling us is it's the cumulative impact. The Member referenced the levy and then he referenced the income tax, were the two things he referenced. He talked about some friend of his was going to pay \$20 a payday or whatever it was, which was a gym membership, basically, in the levy payment – 23 bucks. He said, yeah, I can absorb that. That's a gym payment. I'll make adjustments.

Some people can adjust and some can't but the thing is it is not just about the levy because on top of the levy, you have income tax – granted, an awful lot of people and this hasn't been

mentioned, I'm surprised government Members haven't talked about it more. But my understanding is that there is going to be a lot of federal income tax breaks for a lot of people. So the income tax that's raised by the province is going to be offset by decreases in income tax by the federal government for most people.

The truth of the matter, to put the facts out there as I understand them, is that income tax for the most part, one will balance out the other. The feds are giving, the province is taking back; but, at the end of the day, in terms of people's income tax, they'd be no worse off in that regard.

I don't mind acknowledging it if it's the facts, the best I can at least. So that's good. In addition to the levy, though, we still have the HST, which is an additional 2 per cent. We have the gas, which is 16½ cents and then tax on that so it's about 20 cents, 21 cents, and insurance – insurance is a big one. I've heard from a lot of people on insurance and insurance is a big one. As a matter of fact that brings me to one of the emails which I was asked to read, if I can find it. Oh yes, it's here.

This was just a comment that this constituent said, would you please read this. Basically it said: Came home to my new auto insurance bill with \$211 in HST – sorry that's his auto insurance bill; that's not his house. Came home to my new auto insurance bill with \$211 in HST; thanks a lot, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. That's the exact words in what he said and he wanted me to read.

The point is, I guess, that that's just the auto, then you have your home insurance and some people have a couple of cars and whatever. It is not just the levy. It's the levy, the gas, the HST, the income tax, the insurance – sorry, I'm going to say not the income tax because like I said one balances out the other, for most people at least – and the fees. When you add all that together, it's more than \$23 a payday. So maybe instead of \$23 that could be \$100, whatever the case might be a payday.

People have told me that when they've added it up, some people who I've spoken to said they are coming up with a number about \$5,000 or \$6,000 extra a year. Whatever that works out to

be a month – what's that \$400, \$500 a month? That's a lot of money, so it's important to note that point.

I have one more. I'll probably read this one later because I have two questions I was asked. One question that a constituent asked – and maybe the Minister of Finance is listening there, maybe she might want to address it when she gets up again, perhaps, I would hope. His question is – and I never really thought of this one, but it does make sense. They're saying that when he looked at the levy, if you're making \$50,000 a year, it's \$100 for the levy. That's what's on the –

AN HON. MEMBER: That's net.

MR. LANE: Yes, net. Okay. Well, I'll use example net, okay? So you're making \$50,000 net – maybe it's \$60,000, but I'm just giving it as an example. You make \$50,000 net, it's \$100 a year. If you have –

AN HON. MEMBER: Exactly.

MR. LANE: That's right. If you have two people, a husband and wife and they're both making \$50,000 net, they're paying \$100 each. That's \$200 for that household. If the wife or the husband, it could be either one, is staying home and not working and the other spouse makes \$100,000 net, that's the exact same family income, but now they're paying \$700 as opposed to \$200.

That's a legitimate question. I suppose no matter what way you do it, there are always going to be issues. There's no doubt, if you look at it, that's true. Two at \$50,000 versus at \$100,000 is \$200 for that family and \$700 for the other family, yet they have the exact same family income. Maybe the Minister of Finance, when she speaks again she can maybe comment on that.

The other question that was posed related to the Labrador link study. This is not critical in particular about spending the \$750,000, although there are a lot of people critical of doing that. The point this person is making is that if you do the study – let's say you spend the \$750,000 and you do the study, and for argument's sake the study says, yes, this is something that's viable to do. I have no idea what it might cost, say it's a billion dollars. I don't know, it might be \$10

billion. I don't know, I have no idea, but say it was a billion dollars.

You do the study, so then what? What happens after that? You're saying that you want to balance your budget or be in a surplus in seven years from now. How are you going to be in a surplus in seven years from now if the study says it's going to cost, say, a billion dollars and you go ahead and do it, then you can't be in a surplus. Does that mean then, even if you do the study this year, you can't act upon that study until 10 years from now? If that's the case, then why bother to do it now? Why not do it until you're in a surplus and then do the study?

It doesn't really make a whole lot of sense to spend money on a study and if the result says, yes, it's viable, something you can do. I have no money to do anything with. Now I have to wait for years until I have the money. I thought it was a good question. I never thought of it. That's not my question. That's a question that someone raised to me. I thought it was a very good question. It never occurred to me, but I will throw that out there to the minister as well.

The last thing I'm going to do here, Mr. Chair, is an email I received. Actually, I'll have to do it later because I don't have enough time to find it now. I thought I had it on the phone. Anyway, I thought that was a good question.

Again, going back to – because I'm running out of time – the whole piece on the levy and all the other taxes. One of the concerns, besides people's ability to pay, is the question of the economy. If people are having to spend all this money on paying taxes and fees and so on, then they don't have expendable income. If they don't have expendable income, then how are businesses going to thrive and survive? How are restaurants going to survive and different stores and home repair places and so on? If their business goes under then the people working there are losing jobs. If they don't have jobs, that's more people not paying into the economy, possibly going through social programs and so on.

It's a spiraling effect as it relates to all of these taxes and the impact it will have on the economy. That was another point that has been raised over and over. I think it's important to

keep raising it because it's a very valid point and it's a question people keep asking me. They're fearful of what all this will do to the economy.

With that said, I could go on but unfortunately I'm out of time. I will speak about it again when I get up again.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune.

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's a pleasure for me to rise and continue this debate. I'd like to start out by thanking the minister for her additional information on how much money the levy will now generate, given the new revised levy they put in place based upon the outcry from the people, Mr. Chair.

She tells us the levy is now going to generate – for purposes of our budget on an annualized amount – \$61 million. That makes me just elated because I'm even happier. That strengthens my argument. All you have to do is get rid of that contingency fund of \$30 million and eliminate your full-day kindergarten. You don't need to take a levy from the people for 2016-2017, Mr. Chair. That is where you can find that savings. I thank you for clarifying that for me, Minister.

I want to talk a little bit more about my district and the impacts of the cuts from this budget on rural Newfoundland. Before I do, Mr. Chair, I want to conclude or go back again to the minister's counter-arguments now. When I spoke I talked a lot about spin and government key messaging spin.

Just to clarify for the record, I quoted in my address earlier today the net debt-to-GDP ratio. The minister got up and started waving around the net debt per capita figures. I just want to clarify for the record, these two figures are not one and the same. If you'll humour me, Mr. Chair, I will read into the record the difference between the two.

Net debt per capita is: "A measure of how much debt a government has per citizen. Calculated by adding short-term debt and long-term debt" and I'm reading from a dictionary, Mr. Chair,

just so that I'm proving for the record that these are what the actual definitions are. It's "Calculated by adding short-term debt and long-term debt, subtracting cash and other liquid assets, and dividing by the population, this metric is used as an aid for visualization of the total level of government debt."

You have to humour me because I have to pull it up on my Blackberry again the second definition. That was the definition for net debt per capita. Again, I clarify for the record a totally different thing than net debt-to-GDP ratio, Mr. Chair.

It's almost up here now again online. I will read into the record the net debt-to-GDP ratio again so the Minister of Finance can see that there clearly is a difference. "The debt-to-GDP ratio is the ratio of a country's national debt to its gross domestic product (GDP)" – not to its people, Mr. Chair, but to its gross domestic product. "By comparing what a country owes to what it produces, the debt-to-GDP ratio indicates the country's ability to pay back its debt."

Mr. Chair, while I appreciate the bantering, please don't insult the intelligence of the people of this province. There are many people in this province who understand that net debt per capita is not one and the same as net debt-to-GDP ratio.

With that, I will resort back to talking about how the cumulative impacts of *Budget 2016* are going to devastate rural Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Chair. We live in fear as well as to what the impacts of budget number two are going to mean, particularly in key areas like education and health care which are the fundamental services that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador expect and deserve. Are they cutting and eliminating travel to conferences in Nashville? No. But are they cutting nurses and clinics and shutting down clinics altogether? Yes. We don't understand the logic of the choices. That is why there is an outcry from the public. There are choices this government can make, and there are better choices out there.

I do believe that I heard someone speak earlier in the debate about putting the emphasis and focus in the right areas. That is why the people,

Mr. Chair, are so upset, because we don't see the emphasis and focus in the right areas. You're shutting down libraries, you're shutting down clinics and you're laying off front-line nurses and doctors while you allow the administration to be still very high in numbers of management. So you leave them in management positions, but you take them out of the front line. That is not what the people of Newfoundland and Labrador asked for, it is not what the people of Newfoundland voted for, and it is not what the people of Newfoundland and Labrador deserve.

In rural Newfoundland and Labrador, in particular, I strongly believe we need to strengthen our health care, and we need to strengthen our education levels so that, in turn, we create the environment that allows for the business investor to come in and say, yeah, I want to do business in your town. Because I know if I have an industrial accident, there's a doctor in town that I can go to. I know that if I have children, I have a great school to raise them in and educate them in, Mr. Chair. So in terms of creating an environment that's conducive to growth, I would counter that this budget does absolutely anything but.

I'm going to pick up again on some discussion there by my colleague for Mount Pearl – Southlands, who talked about the Labrador study again and how he received an email from someone who was questioning why are you doing the study now. Because let's say, hypothetically, it comes back yeah, this is a good thing to do, where's the money going to come from? We don't have it up to 2021. So why are we closing libraries this year and paying for something that is non-essential? It's the logic of these types of decisions, Mr. Chair, that the people are struggling with and very disappointed with.

As my hon. colleague for Ferryland said in his speech earlier this morning, this budget is really too much, too fast. It's too much pain and there's no clear plan, Mr. Chair. I truly hope – in fact, I'm rather confident that I'll see the day when we talk about the positive aspects of Newfoundland and Labrador again. I know that when the next election comes, people are not necessarily going to take everything that is said by Members opposite at their word because they know their word absolutely cannot be relied on.

That is the only thing that has clearly been proven to us since November 30.

I, for one, would like to encourage residents to stay and make their life here. Prior to becoming a politician, I worked in community economic development in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. We had a great success story, Madam Chair, in aquaculture. We actually have, in rural Newfoundland and Labrador –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MS. PERRY: Madam Chair, there is some heckling from the opposite side, if you could name the Member or give me some protection that would be absolutely great. Thank you so much.

The aquaculture story in the Coast of Bays is one of great success. We see new housing starts; on average, six or seven per year in rural, remote Newfoundland and Labrador. We see young people moving back home and building houses, having children. We actually see an increase in the number of children who are attending our libraries and the number of children who are attending our schools, Madam Chair. That is because we had a vision for diversification of this province. We had a belief in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. We did provide the supports around ensuring we had the necessary infrastructure in terms of water, sewer and roadwork. It all takes time.

Government Members opposite, in one breath, they like to call it wastage and, in the next breath, they actually acknowledge that it is essential if you're going to attract businesses and have your community grow and prosper from a point of view of both stabilizing your existing businesses and attracting new ones.

Again, I will reiterate I do hope we raise the bar of debate in this House, not to bantering and throwing insults back and forth, but to what we can really do collectively as a people to make Newfoundland and Labrador a better place to live, what we can do collectively as a people to attract more people to want to live in and stay here, raise their families and call Newfoundland and Labrador their home for their entire life, for their children and for their children's children, Madam Chair. It's all about creating a future that

is sustainable and prosperous. I truly do believe the potential exists.

I will do what I can as an individual resident living in this province to continually promote our prosperity, to continue my belief in our strength as a people. Whether you have a grade 11 education, whether you have a university education or you are educated by the school of life, the people in this province are fine people. We have a great future ahead, if we get a new government.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

CHAIR (Dempster): Seeing no further questions, I will call the vote.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair, I appreciate the opportunity to speak again to Bill 14, which is the levy bill, but as we said a number of times this is part of a bigger issue as it relates to the budget as a whole. While we've talked about the levy, and that's what is in this bill, I just want to talk a few minutes now about another aspect of the budget which, I guess, along with the levy, when you add it together, is going to have a negative, cumulative impact on the people of my district and the people of the province. It's going to have a negative impact to differing degrees depending on people's financial circumstances and so on, and that relates to the gas tax, Madam Chair.

As we know, part of these budgetary measures, to which the levy is just one piece, we have the gas tax and that's going to raise – as we know, it's been raised – 16½ on a litre of gas and then 13 per cent on it now up until July 1. Then come July 1, it will be 15 per cent, so that's up to about 20 or 21 cents on a litre of gasoline. Now, that's before we get into the normal raises. Normally this time of the year, of course, when we get into the summertime people are using their vehicles more, people are using their travel trailers and all of that stuff, there's more movement on our highways, more tourism and

so on, the demand goes up and, as a result, the price of gas generally goes up.

So in addition to the major increase we saw just the other day, it's a good chance it's going to go up naturally on top of that again. There are going to be much higher gas prices and that is going to add to people's financial burden. Of course, that's going to have an impact on the economy. During the whole budget process, a while back, I went out knocking on some random doors in my district to see how people felt about the budget.

That was an issue for one couple; they are a retired couple, an elderly couple. They don't have a high income by any means. They have the basics, but they also have a small work pension and so on, so they don't qualify for a lot of the programs. They are on that fixed income.

For them, the price of gas was going to be a big issue. They said we don't travel a lot. We hardly ever travel outside the province. The only bit of travel that we do, as a general rule, is around the province and on a Sunday afternoon, we like to leave Mount Pearl, get aboard our car on a Sunday or a Saturday and drive out to Bay Roberts. A lot of people do that; my wife does it all the time. My wife and her mother and her sister, many times, on a Saturday or whatever they'll get aboard the car and they'll go to Bay Roberts for the day.

They go to Bay Roberts. They go to Wescals, I think, is the name of the store and I'm not really familiar with all of them. I think Wescals is the name of one of them. Then they go to Powell's bakery and pick up a couple of things, then they have dinner, have lunch there, whatever the case might be. They are going to drop money in that community.

That is no different than what this particular couple said. We do that on a regular basis but with all of the cumulative impact of all the taxes and in particular the gasoline, for them, that's a big issue. They are saying: Well, Paul, we usually do that two, three weekends out of the month during the summer. We'll be lucky if we do it once a month now. We won't be able to afford to do it every week or, say, two or three weeks a month. It might be once a month.

That is having an impact on their bit of enjoyment in life for one thing, as seniors, to get out of the house and spend time together and take in a few sights and enjoy the scenery and quality of life issues. But in addition to that, what kind of impact is it having on the Town of Bay Roberts and Carbonear and so on? Because there are so many people like them who go there all the time on a regular basis and if they are going to stop going there, then that means in theory that Powell's is going to see their business impacted in a negative way, Powell's bakery, and the local restaurants are going to see an impact, Fong's or whoever, different places up there. They are going to see an impact and Wescals is going to see an impact. Maybe the gas bar is going to see an impact and you get the picture; we go on and on.

The point is that raising the gas, in addition to having a negative impact on the individuals having to pay for it, it is going to impact people's consumption. It is going to impact people's ability to drive around and go places and stuff and then that's going to have an impact on the local economies in the places where they go.

Another impact, there are a lot of trickle-down effects as well. You take, for example, a taxi driver. If you're a taxi driver, you think about them, they're paying the highest kind of insurance anyway. Their insurance is not the same as a person with their regular insurance on their car. I'm pretty sure, because they're a taxi, they need special insurance because of their passengers and all that. I'd say their insurance is much higher.

So right off the bat, they are going to be hit with the 15 per cent tax on the insurance. Then every litre of gas they get is going to cost them another 20 cents basically or 21 cents, or whatever it works out to with the tax, a litre on every litre of gas they burn. Then, as we know, taxi cabs are constantly in and out of the garage. They go through brakes constantly, water pumps, different things, tires would be another one obviously that they would go through, windshield wash, windshield wipers, headlights, all those stuff because a taxi is going all the time, constantly being used. A lot of times being used by multiple people, so there are a lot of

repairs, and now it is going to cost them an extra 2 per cent on the HST for all their repairs.

So you have your 2 per cent on your HST, you have your insurance and you have your gasoline. And to go register the vehicle is going to cost you more and the driver's licence is going to cost you more. So they are getting hit every way you turn. These people don't make big livings to begin with. They are only struggling, most of them. Everything that is necessary to them is going to cost them so much more.

What's going to end up happening – it's going to have to happen – they are going to go now to the City of St. John's or the City of Mount Pearl, wherever they are, to the town or the city and apply to have their meter rate raised to a higher level in order to cover off their expenses.

When that happens, who are generally the customers that are using the taxis to begin with? Not to totally generalize because anyone can use a taxi. We know that there are people that use taxis if they go down on George Street and they do not want to drink and drive they get a tax; that happens. Beyond that, though, a lot of the regular users of taxis are senior citizens on fixed incomes and people on low incomes who can't afford to own a car, persons with disabilities and so on. The most vulnerable group, if you will, of people in our society are the people who generally depend on taxis to get around. They do. I don't have the stats, but anecdotally I believe that to be the case.

Where are they getting the money to pay for it? A lot of these people don't have enough money to get by now. If they need a taxi to go to a doctor's appointment or something like that, critical things – it's one thing to say I'm going to not go to the mall as often or whatever. People have to go for doctor's appointments and different things like that, that you cannot avoid, and they require that transportation. They require that taxi. Now it's going to cost them more.

Really, that's one example of the trickle-down effect – well, it is two examples. One is from a tourist perspective, local economy, people not driving their cars, not travelling to towns; therefore, not dropping their money in those towns. Another example is people using taxis

and the impact it's going to have on them. Those are just two examples.

There are all kinds of other examples because there are lots of people who have businesses and part of their business involves the use of vehicles, whether it be courier services or lawn maintenance companies or whatever and paving companies. If they have to pay more for fuel and more for repairs and all that kind of stuff, guess what? They're going to pass that on to the consumer.

It's the same thing with groceries. Every time gas goes up, groceries go up. Whether they should or not is just the excuse they need to drive the groceries up. We see it all the time. There are a lot of negative impacts around that. I look forward to speaking about this and other things later on.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Ferryland.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm pleased to stand and have a few more comments on Bill 14. I certainly enjoyed listening so far today in regard to the items that have been discussed so far. For those that are out there maybe just joining the debate, this is An Act to Amend the Income Tax Act. It outlines the amendment to impose the temporary Deficit Reduction Levy brought in by this government in *Budget 2016*.

Just explicitly it says: "An individual shall pay a deficit reduction levy in accordance with subsection (3) for each of the taxation years 2016 to 2019, inclusive, if the individual is a resident in the province on the last day of each of those taxation years." So it's three actual taxation years. While we hear from the Opposition side it is temporary, it is outlined for three taxation years. Whether it will be terminated based on that legislation, after that third year, or any change, obviously there would need to be an amendment made to it. The point is, I guess, it is definitive for those years. It is an extra income taken from Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in regard to disposable income, along with other fees, increase in personal

income tax, increase in things like the gas tax that we've seen in the last couple of days. People certainly witnessed it in what it means in filling your vehicle, again, disposal income, net income right out of their pocket. There is certainly a lot of discussion on that wherever I go and I'm a sure a lot of us too in regard to the cost and what that is going to mean.

I think someone mentioned during the night the cumulative effect of all of these, that's really the concern. Everybody understands, I think, that based on the financial situation, the reduction in revenues, certainly the oil price reduction, there was a need to look at our balance sheet and look at additional revenues and cutting expenses. That's the balance that you normally would take.

Within that raising of expenses, you normally would look at taxation, you look at fees and other variables like that. I guess the issue with this – and we've heard consistently – is this is too much, too fast. It's broad based. It's reaching into many different areas in terms of people's lives. What it's going to do, and I think most agree, is that it's going to impact the economy dramatically at a time when we want stability in our economy. We want to continue to grow and move along. An economy grows and sustains itself based on the ability of people to spend, people to be employed, drive an environments where young people can raise their family, where you can build that infrastructure that allows them to stay, whether that is schools, whether that is medical care, or whether that is recreational facilities.

Those are the kind of things, those clusters of activities and environments where families want to live, raise their family, seek employment and do those things that they need to do that generates taxation, that allows the economy and communities – small and large – to grow. And there's a threshold in terms of what you can charge and what you can pull from people's pockets to the point where you negatively affect the economy. That's where we are gone with this budget. We've gone way over that threshold and we're going to negatively influence the economy to the point that it's not going to do us any good in the next year or two while we see our way through some difficult times in terms of some of our revenues.

A lot of that is certainly related to the dramatic reduction in the price of oil. Now, we've seen some recovery of that. Marginally, today I think it's at \$51, but nevertheless, it's long term we have to look at. The Canadian dollar, the exchange rate on that in terms of exports really affects us as well. So there are two variables really. There's the barrel of oil and there's the exchange rate. Both of those collectively puts us in a position where we could raise additional revenues based on the budget which was allocated this year which was about \$40, I believe, in this year's budget. Based on those two variables, we could have additional revenues.

Now, as I said, the concern here with this levy and with other items in the budget is the effect it has on average Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and all demographics. Because while there was a reduction in the levy from, I think it was from \$20,000 to \$50,000, all these other variables in the budget and means to collect extra revenue affects everybody. Whether it's the drug program and over-the-counter different items that are covered – some have that covered now.

I've spoken to, just recently, a couple in my district that those items were covered due to a condition they had. Both of them are on fixed incomes, but now all of a sudden they have to pay for that item. So that comes out of a set income they have on a monthly basis and that's dollars out of their pocket. Right off the bat, that's just one item they pay more.

So just move that up to filling up their car, based on normally filling up their vehicle. They're on a fixed income so they're looking at another \$10 to \$20, based on filling up their vehicle in terms of extra gas tax and the HST being on as well. Then you move to the 15 per cent put back on insurance. It could be anywhere from \$100 to \$200. That's money as well that's coming straight out of their pocket, over and above, and gets to the whole issue we talked about and has been talked about over the past number of hours is the cumulative effect of all of these moves and how negatively it's affecting people on a personal level, in terms of how they operate their household and, as well, from an economic point of view how it affects.

I spoke earlier of groups I've met in my district in regard to the change in busing with contracts coming up and putting them out to tender and proposed savings of a couple million dollars related to busing contracts. Both in the Goulds region, Petty Harbour-Maddox Cove and from Bay Bulls to Bauline area, I've spoken to many parents and they represented their concerns. I have a lot of emails here on particulars of how that is going to negatively affect those.

The classic one here is the change of an earlier start time and an earlier end for younger children. It's not the older children. The older youth are being pushed out, a later start date, later time coming out of school. So what that means for the younger kids that often siblings or family members would care for them, that's has become very problematic. What happens in that situation is that in many cases where parents, professionals, could commute to St. John's, could be working in Long Harbour, all different variables of what they could be doing, but what this change has done is basically changed that structure they have in regard to how they care for their children and how that family unit is set up and structured to allow for that care to take place.

That starts from early morning from when a child gets up at 6:30, has to get maybe to a bus stop a half an hour earlier, maybe 45 minutes earlier. It is dark in the morning. I think there are 56 days that have been identified with these changes that young children will be walking to a bus stop, probably in poorer conditions in the wintertime, when it's dark. All of those things are very concerning and one of the big ones is the safety of our children.

With these changes that are being proposed, the safety of the younger children that are up earlier in the morning, that are in conditions that may not be as conducive as they are today, certainly in the dark, all of that causes grave concerns for parents and for the school community in many instances.

I was talking about child care, so what happens – I know in somewhere like Bay Bulls and Witless Bay there is an after-school program that now exists where the kids get to access that right after school. They pay a certain fee for it, the same thing I see in the Gould's area. That's set

so if they can't access additional daycare hours – number one if they can, obviously it is a cost to the parents and to the family, above all the other fees and taxes we are going to pay in this budget. So that's downloaded to them that amount that they need to pay. So they need to come up with that. That is net dollars right out of their pocket to try and get that daycare availability because of an hour or two in the afternoon now that don't have daycare which they have now.

If they can get it, they need to pay more but their question is: Can they get it? They may not get it. If they can't get it, that becomes a concern for a parent or two parents that are working and how do they accommodate that currently in their work schedule.

So this is very problematic. I guess the one thing I heard from parents and for community groups is the dialogue and consultation. It came through the budget, through the Minister of Education. It was directed out to the English school district and then parents and family were given a notice. This is what the change is, this is what it's going to be, without doing any inventory or any check on what the options were, what daycare was available, what after school was available, how it could be adjusted, just lay it out to them.

The worse part of all of this is now it's handed to them and say, okay, here's the extra cost, so you deal with it. It's not good enough. I call on the Minister of Education and your school district to deal with this, to work with parents so we can get this resolved to the betterment of our children and to our families.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Minister of Transportation and Works.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the bill that we're discussing with the temporary levy. It's been a good discussion. Certainly it's given every Member that's sitting in this House an opportunity to express how they feel and their position. Obviously, Members

opposite see it differently than Members on the government side.

Of course, as I've mentioned, Madam Chair, in my previous times that I've stood to speak, I totally respect the comments from the Opposition because, indeed, it's their responsibility to do that. It's a responsibility of the Opposition to hold us accountable. If they weren't doing that they would not be exercising their responsibility. I fully realize that and respect the comments they make.

Again, Madam Chair, as I've said before, this is a very difficult budget. This is a very tough budget. We fully realize and recognize that we are trying to put measures in place to combat the exorbitant amount of debt we have incurred over the last number of years. Unfortunately, Madam Chair, we have for the last 10 to 12 years – we've had good years.

I don't know if I can use this analogy, Madam Chair, but it almost reminds me of the story in the Bible when you had seven good years and seven bad years. We have come through a time in our history where we've had a great time. There's been the oil industry, it's been booming; the natural resources. We've had a great return on investments. We've had companies that have made money. We've had a government that has received royalties. So, Madam Chair, we've come through this period where we're in sort of a – we go through an ebb and we go through a flow, ebb and flow. We've come through a period of time whereby we have seen a lot of capacity to invest into infrastructure.

Madam Chair, I know the Members opposite have talked about the fact that they have invested in infrastructure. I'm not questioning that because I think if you look around, areas that have received infrastructure funding – I know I spent six years as mayor of the beautiful Town of Grand Falls-Windsor perfectly centered in this province. We worked very closely with the former government. We worked very closely on multi-year works and multi-year projects. I am not at all questioning that.

I know the people in my district – and the former Member, who served in a number of portfolios and a good friend of mine, did an excellent job for the constituents in Grand Falls-

Windsor – Buchans and really served the constituents of that district and gave it 100 per cent. It would be remiss of me if I didn't acknowledge that because she did, in fact, contribute a lot to the communities of Grand Falls-Windsor, Badger, Buchans, Millertown and Buchans Junction.

However, Madam Chair, one of the issues I have and one of the problems I have is how we, as a government, can tackle the debt that we have. I fully understand that if you make investments – it's great to make investments, but it's only good to make investments if you know you have a plan in place where you can get something to offset the investments you make.

Right now, Madam Chair, we're in a very difficult position financially. The financial position that we're in is the fact that we have a debt that's not sustainable. It's absolutely not sustainable. It's necessary for us to take measures to be able to offset the debt servicing that we have.

I have repeated this on numerous occasions, Madam Chair, if we continue down the road that we're going, we are facing disaster. We're facing disastrous results. If you look at our bond rating, one of the reasons why our bond rating was not affected the same way as the bond rating was affected in Alberta is because we made different choices than the Province of Alberta. How we are going to address the deficit, what measures we're going to put in place as a government to offset and to try to curb some of the deficit that we have.

These are measures that are important when we go to the international bond-rating agencies. When we're going out and we're looking at – we're saying this is our fiscal forecast. This is where we are, this is where we are hoping to be and the path we're going to take over the next six, seven years to get to surplus. Obviously, for the time being – and I use the words, for the time being – the bond-rating agencies were quite comfortable with the fact that they felt that we as a province – and the Finance Minister – are moving in the right direction.

The Finance Minister, along with the Cabinet and our government are taking tough measures, are making tough decisions. They're not popular

but they're tough. So they were satisfied that they were able to establish a rating for us right now that did not lower us any lower than where we are at the present time. As a result of that, Madam Chair, we find that we do have more than favourable interest rates at the present time. We're just hoping we can maintain that so we do not place and we do not incur extra cost and extra interest on the debt that we have.

One of the key things, I think, Madam Chair, that the Finance Minister has pointed out quite clearly over the last number of times is the fact that when we are doing a debt servicing, we are doing a debt servicing on interest. We have to realize that not only do we have an interest problem, we have a principal problem.

If I have a mortgage and I'm only always paying off interest and I can't get at the principal, I'm going to be in a very sad state in a very short time. I'm going to have the banks coming and looking for answers because all I'm doing is putting off, because I'm only paying interest.

So, Madam Chair, it's very important for us to get a wholesome picture of all the financial implications that we're facing. One of the things that we need to look at –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. HAWKINS: Do you like that? Do you like the wholesome?

One of the things we have to look at, Madam Chair, is the fact that we have to address the issues that we're facing. We cannot wait five years. We cannot wait 10 years. We cannot continue with the status quo. We've already established that. We've already told the people of Newfoundland and Labrador that we cannot continue down the road we're going.

So somewhere, somebody has to take leadership. Somebody has to stand up and somebody has to say that this is not acceptable. The status quo is not acceptable. We have to understand that making decisions sometimes that are tough decisions and that impact quite a number of people – I just want to point out before my time is quickly gone again that this temporary levy is now going to be impacting one in four individuals in our province.

I think there's been a significant shift. We said that is a temporary levy. We have made that statement again, if, in fact, there is more offsetting revenue that will come our way, we will take measures to remove this as quickly as possible. The same goes for the gas tax.

Madam Chair, these are measures that we fully understand. We are fully cognizant of where we are as a province, where we are financially, and these are measures we intend to implement to make sure we're sustainable for the future.

CHAIR: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member his time for speaking has expired.

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Madam Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

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

I am very happy once again to stand and to speak to Bill 14, the levy legislation. It's been an interesting evening. It's been an interesting day. It's been an interesting night. It's been an interesting morning. We've heard much here in this House, but what we really haven't heard and what I think the people of the province hunger for, they really hunger for because they've seen the budget – Madam Chair, I've been sitting here looking through the budget. I have the budget right here with me.

I looked for some sign that there's a plan to get people to work, there's a plan to strengthen our communities, there's a plan to strengthen our seniors, to strengthen our infrastructure, to strengthen our health care system and I don't see any of that.

The conclusion is, "Our government has a plan for the future of the province – one that will achieve fairness for all generations of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

"Short-term thinking and short-term planning is something I will not do. We will not sit idly by

and hope for things to improve. Our plan is driven by the vision for long-term sustainability for our province and our people – something that can only be achieved through decisive and strategic short, medium and long-term actions.

"Led by our Premier, backed by the strength and skill of the Cabinet and Caucus, we will gather the facts, analyze the data, make plans, and execute and evaluate our performance.

"We will hold ourselves accountable. We will get results.

"Today marks a bold step forward and we have much work to do.

"Mr. Speaker, I can assure the people of the province we will not stop until we have our province back on stable financial footing and we have restored confidence in the fiscal future of this great province we are proud to call home."

So basically what her conclusion is that they're going to stick to whatever kind of cost measures they're going to do. There's nothing about working together with the people of the province, investing in our greatest resource, which is the people of the province, making sure that they're strengthened, and making sure that we go forward. That is what people are looking for.

They are looking for leadership. They are looking for someone to say, we know how difficult this financial situation is; however, in spite of it, we are going to work together to weather this storm, we are going to work together to strengthen our communities, to not just to get a deficit down or not just to get a debt down – although those are important things. Everybody knows that, nobody is denying that, but there is no inspiration here in terms of a concrete plan to get people to work, to make sure that our communities can thrive.

I would like to speak a little bit to the Deficit Reduction Levy that government and the Minister of Finance introduced. The Deficit Reduction levy merry-go-round is a classic example, Madam Chair, of what happens when a budget is put together as some kind of bean-counting exercise instead of being founded in clear values and policy objectives.

The last time I got up to spoke, again, I spoke about how important it is – and when people have asked us, well, what would we do? The first thing I've identified is that we would build a budget based on values and principles. We absolutely wouldn't put everything on the table, because not everything should be on the table. There's a reason we're sitting on different sides of the House, Madam Chair, because we would have different approaches. So every item in the budget is a decision, but also it comes from a particular approach – how would you approach this crisis? That's the difference between the way we would approach it and the way government has chosen to approach it.

We knew that this was off to a bad start on *Budget 2016* when the very first question the minister asked in her so-called public consultations – because I went to a few of them; I wanted to hear from the people of the province as well – was: What should we cut? Not what government services are important to you? Not what supports do you and your family need? Not what values and principles should guide public policy? It's what should we cut? What three things would you cut? That's not about building a budget that can sustain the province. That's an accounting exercise.

Again I'd like to refer folks to Doug House who was the chair of the Economic Recovery Commission from 1989-1996. Their role was looking at how can we make Newfoundland and Labrador more sustainable? How can we make our rural communities more sustainable? How can we plan for the future?

This is what he said. Now he said this again in the late 1990s and here we are 20-odd years later, about that, still grappling with some of these situations. Of course once the Conservative government was elected, they closed down on the Economic Recovery Commission. He said: "The economy does not operate in isolation. Successful economic development depends on successful social development and sound environmental management."

We've heard a little bit today from the Minister of Environment and Conservation of his plans around carbon emissions. The previous administration and the one before that really

haven't done much in this area. So maybe we can have a little bit of hope in this area. Maybe there is actually going to be something happening.

"Successful economic development depends on successful social development and sound environmental management." That makes sense. "Education and training, employment programs, social-security reforms, transportation and communications, infrastructure development – all need to be coordinated and integrated so as to contribute to economic development ... At the regional level, this should be done through the leadership of the twenty regional economic development boards" Well, we know what happened to those RED boards.

Madam Chair, here we have a budget that really is not integrating all those aspects. We have an accounting exercise that this Minister of Finance did, trying to deal with the incredible, incredible level of debt that also translates itself into an incredible deficit for this year's budget.

We know how difficult that is. We can imagine how difficult that is. However, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are willing to swallow the bitter medicine if, in fact, it makes things better. But it doesn't because they're even telling us it's not going to make things better and that maybe we'll get to surplus – I don't know what that means – in seven years.

What should we cut? Madam Chair, this is a budget that predicts its own failure. It sets forth a projection that employment will be reduced by 15 per cent and earned income by 22 per cent. That's what this budget is projecting. It's predicting its own failure. Imagine.

If you had a choice between a budget that actually invested in people, that guaranteed we would get people back to work, that guaranteed it would sustain its communities and all the social supports that are needed, health care, education, child care, home care, if we had a budget that said we are going to be able to strengthen our communities, we are going to be able to strengthen our people, or we can just get stuck in a budget that is not about Jim and Mary from Bonavista, but entirely about Standard & Poor's, which one would we choose? I'm sure if people had a choice, I'm sure if the people here

in the House had a choice they would choose the budget that, in fact, pointed to clearly strengthening our communities and strengthening our province, a budget that really harnessed the energy of our people, a budget that got people to work.

That's what we'd all want. I know we would. We would all want that. Whether it be in rural Labrador, whether it be in rural Newfoundland, whether it be in our urban settings, we'd all want people to be able to work and provide for their families and participate in the prosperity of our province. That's the kind of budget we would all want.

This budget that has been delivered for 2016-17 does not do that. It's actually a plan for failure. It also attributes 40 to 50 per cent of those negative outcomes to deficit reduction measures. They're saying on page 5 of their budget that their actual deficit reduction measures will cause further employment and will also cause a drop in income for our workers. It's not the kind of budget we want in our province, not at all.

CHAIR: Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: Thanks, Madam Chair.

I look forward to speaking again.

Thank you.

CHAIR: I remind the hon. Member her time for speaking has expired.

The Chair recognizes the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island.

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Madam Chair.

It is good to be back again (inaudible) after a late night last night by everybody in the House debating Bill 14, the levy bill. Last night, up until seven when I left this morning, I had spoken on the bill itself 12 times. I talked a lot about different components of the budget.

For those who are watching at home, we are doing Bill 14, which is the levy bill, but it's part and parcel of the bigger picture of the budget. So it gives us an opportunity to talk about all the challenges in this budget and to acknowledge

some of the challenges that we are facing, but particularly the impact that this budget is going to have on the average citizen in Newfoundland and Labrador and how we are proposing a different approach to how we can alleviate some of those stresses that would be on individuals.

We did acknowledge that the levy has changed somewhat to at least address the issues around having to pay a tax for a number of people in this province. That is one positive but, unfortunately, that one positive doesn't outweigh the hundreds of other negatives that are in this and are going to have a negative impact on people's lives in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Last night we got into some heated debate and there was great the bantering back and forth and there was great information shared. One of the Members opposite asked a question of what did ye do the money when ye were in there? I never got a chance to answer that because I was too heavy in with the Minister of Education debating around the merits of the cuts to our education system and the impact they would have on our students in this province and how it would make us regressive around education instead of progressive.

Unfortunately I didn't get an opportunity to outline some of the things that we had done while we were in there. Just to explain, people wanted to know and rightfully so, taxpayers need to know the oil revenues that came through over the last decade or so, when the oil prices were up to a certain level, it gave us an opportunity to do certain things – a great opportunity to catch up on the infrastructure projects that haven't been done by previous administrations, not just by a previous Liberal administration but by the PC administration also because the monies weren't there at the time.

It was an opportunity then to really reassess the priorities and ensure, once your infrastructure is in place and you've invested billions in that, then it makes it easier to make decisions around keeping core programs going. Those core programs would be around base education, be around health care, would be around inclusion, would be around taking care of your seniors, would be around taking care of early childhood development.

I'm just going to offset some of the costing analysis here, some of the criticism that we had gotten. I am hoping and legitimately I feel people just needed to be informed. Where did this money go at the time? I'll just outline some of the things.

For those who may not be aware for years and years, I guess ever since Confederation, we've been on equalization with the federal administration. What that means for any province whose Gross National Product levels are below a certain standard nationally, then they get subsidized by the other provinces and it all flows through the federal government. It would be based on your population; it's based on your expenditures, as part of this process.

Right now in this county there are probably six or seven other provinces that get equalization and it turns around depending on how their economies pick up. Fortunately for us, the last decade we were fortunate enough to be able to – with our oil regimes, with our equalization necessities not being there, with the cost of oil being up, with our abilities to get the other mineral resources moving forward, we were able to generate enough revenue that we no longer were entitled to it. That was fine because that gave an opportunity for the monies that would have went to Newfoundland and Labrador to go somewhere else, to another province who had some challenges around education or health care or infrastructure, like we had for decades and decades.

Just to offset the equalization in the same period of time in less than a decade that I'm talking about because that's when the core thing, people think it's – we were in power for 12 years. There was only a period of time there, really, an eight-year window where the revenues being generated exceeded our ability to qualify for equalization. So that was great, fine. We were happy to do our part. We were happy to be able to say to the rest of Canada hopefully, if there's a program in your province now, we had a small bit to be able to do to help ensure that moves forward.

There was \$10 billion that came off the equalization payments. So that's \$10 billion with a revenue we would have gotten from the federal government that we now have to pick up to put

back into our day-to-day activities. Which included paying our civil servants, it included all of our health care costs, our education costs, our infrastructure costs: all the things relevant to what it takes to run an administration and a government day in and day out, all the services for young people, all the services for seniors. That's \$10 billion.

There's some dispute if it was \$25 billion we had, \$28 billion to \$30 billion. I'm going to say we were in the vicinity of \$30 billion. Thirty billion dollars would be, I think, in the right category. So there's \$10 billion automatically, monies that we would have had coming in that would have went into our budget lines.

Infrastructure; we spent \$6 billion. We all admit we were so far behind. Again, we've talked about it multiple times. I've talked about it and my colleagues have. We had mouldy schools. There was always an issue. All during when I worked as a civil servant in the '80s, the '90s and the early to mid-2000s, it was always issues about having to close the school. The school districts having to close a school because of mould, health issues, parents protesting. Kids coming home with ailments that nobody knew why. There were all kinds of issues relevant to that. Health professionals coming out and saying there is a real challenge here.

We said as one of our key objectives – because that's connected to our health care. That's part of it, but it's also connected to a bigger picture. You can't learn in an environment if it's not conducive to learning.

The first objective was let's put in the infrastructure. One of the key areas we invested in infrastructure was improving schools. We built 14 new schools. There are seven or eight more projects on the go. We renovated 37 other schools. We did 1,600 other types of investments in add-ons in some kind of tearing out classrooms, removing mould, putting in filtration systems for water systems and putting in ventilation systems: all these things to ensure that there was a conducive learning environment for the students in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I have to note, we've done this from the Coast of Labrador where we invested dramatically, and rightfully so, into education and health care.

We've done it from the Bonavista Peninsula, the Baie Verte Peninsula, the Burin Peninsula, all through, the Connaigre Peninsula, from Port aux Basques right to the Northern Peninsula. Everywhere we felt there was a gap in services when it came to healthy education in schools, we invested. So there was \$6 billion.

That also took in other things from firefighting equipment to roads, to upgrading bridges and bypasses. Now, could we have used another \$6 billion? My colleague, the Minister of Transportation and Works is probably just as knowledgeable, probably more knowledgeable now because he now knows, even a year later, there are also other challenges around infrastructure and the amounts of money you could use to bring it up to par.

What we did is put a good dent in how far behind we were with infrastructure to ensure once we go to a point there, then we could concentrate on our revenues to be in other areas. Other areas then would be simply around program delivery for senior citizens, for special needs adults, special needs children, around educational programs, about social recreation inclusion. Just about citizens' engagement in communities. So these are the types of things we were really caught on.

One of the big things – and I was happy to say when I worked as a civil servant I had the opportunity to sit on the steering committee when this was first being discussed – was around poverty reduction. We had looked at it. Part of our issue was around some of our education challenges from a societal point of view. Some of it was around some of our remote isolated areas. Some of it was around because of our economics. The opportunities that people may not have had about poverty reduction.

We talked about, how do we give people a hand up and not a hand out? How do we develop programs and services? What do we do to ensure we're not the lowest in this country when it comes to our opportunities for poorer people, the working poor, those who have some challenges, disadvantaged, to be able to have a leg up? So we looked at it. We did a jurisdictional scan. We looked around other parts of the country, other parts of the world, but we looked internally. We looked at a lot of good programs.

There were a multitude of multi-organizational partnerships that we said we could partner with them. We don't have to reinvent the wheel. They're doing great work. Why don't we find a way that we can tweak it, that more people have access to that program, where we offer something they can never do because they didn't have the resources to bring in the expertise, or they didn't have the expertise and we could identify that for them.

So we invested \$1.2 billion to ensure people who have some challenges from an economic point of view, people who want to be able to have a better career path in life, who want to be able to make some choices will have those opportunities. We managed to partner with no less than 45 different organizations. At the same time, we developed a whole branch, and the Poverty Reduction Strategy was under a branch within the Income Support division.

That was based on the principle of how do we ensure people in this province have a better quality of life – and we did a great job. I say we, collectively, all the groups there, because 75 per cent of the people doing all this work had no direct connection to government themselves. They were outside. They were non-government organizations who have as their main objective to support and help. That included church organizations, social agencies. It included community organizations. It was a very positive partnership. Probably one of the best in my 30 years as a civil servant that I had the privilege of being part of.

We made some great strides. We went, as people know, from the worst to the best, but even at the best there are still challenges. The best may mean you've improved dramatically, but that's because we had to move up. There are still things to do. We had talked about how we still improve things for people who have some challenges, and how we still support it. We continue to do that.

What we're encouraging in this budget is not to forget that group of individuals who are struggling but have as their main objective, and all of ours in society, is to be able to move forward. Be able to make sure they have a better quality of life, their children do, and they can contribute back into our society.

Madam Chair, I'll have a chance to speak a little bit more about some of the investments.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

CHAIR: The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Madam Chair.

As I said earlier, I'm really amazed by the number of people who are following this debate so closely. We continue to receive Facebook messages, texts, Twitter messages and emails from citizens who are actually watching this debate and wanting to be engaged in the debate, wanting to have things read out in the House of Assembly and wanting to have questions asked. I think that's great, and I think it bodes well for democracy in our province, quite frankly.

I have this email here now that I was asked to read out. I must say it's very well written and very respectful, which is more than I can say for some. I have to say, some of the things I've seen kicking around have been – I wouldn't read them in the House of Assembly, put it that way, but this one certainly here is well done.

It says: Dear government MHAs of all political parties; I understand the financial crisis that we must all stand together to shoulder the burden. I accept we have a tremendous deficit and can appreciate how the price of oil has impacted our ability to offer service, maintain infrastructure, sustain employment of the public sector and to maintain previous levels of taxes and user fees. In conversations I have expressed my understanding of a difficult budget in a difficult time. It serves no purpose to blame anyone or party for where we are now. Nobody could foresee the freefall the price of oil would take.

My position since the budget is that, yes, it is very difficult to make ends meet, and the increase in taxes and fees will be extremely difficult for most of us. Maybe there were other options to help us navigate this crisis, but there is no doubt that we have to take a stringent course of action.

As a father, I would rather endure the hardship now than to pass along our problems and a paralyzing debt to my children. We have to address this issue now and when we see better times again we have to learn from this that we must be better prepared for any future challenges in the price of oil, diversify the economy and think long term for when the oil may run out or the world no longer relies so heavily on fossil fuels, that it may not be feasible to continue to develop oil projects.

That all said, the levy to be a resident of this province is the one pill that I find difficult to swallow. How must the world look at us for imposing a levy to live here? I offer that it would have been more palatable to have added the revenue generated from the levy into an extra percentage on our income tax or the additional gas tax, rather than a separate Deficit Reduction Levy. If I may ask one thing that the government reconsider from the budget is that the levy be eliminated from the strategy to improve our financial situation.

Regardless of political party, every MHA in the House is a Member of government. I believe that each of you are there because you believe in the province, it's people, and you have an honest desire to contribute to making our province a better place. While parties will differ on opinion, beliefs and strategy, it is by considering all perspectives and options that we make the best decision. Sincerely.

That's another email from an individual who is following along with the debate and wanted to get his point across. So I was glad to read that for him.

Next, I have a question. I don't see the Minister of Municipal Affairs here but I'm sure someone will pass it along. Well, the Member for Burgeo – La Poile, I guess it would apply to him as well, anybody on the West Coast. The question this individual wanted raised, this was on Twitter. There are eight –

MR. A. PARSONS: Madam Chair.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the Government House Leader on a point of order.

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, I believe the Member (inaudible). I believe that's unparliamentary.

MR. LANE: If I did, I withdraw.

AN HON. MEMBER: You did, actually.

MR. LANE: Okay, I withdraw. No problem. I didn't –

AN HON. MEMBER: You're tired.

MR. LANE: Yes, I'm tired. I've been here 23 hours. Anyway, no big deal.

I was asked to raise this issue. The question this individual has is that he's questioning the \$8 million expenditure for the Corner Brook hospital. His question is: What about the \$8 million for the Corner Brook hospital that they can never afford to build? That's his perspective.

I guess he's wondering, given our financial situation, we've budgeted \$8 million for the Corner Brook hospital and is that a reality? Will that happen? When will it happen? Maybe one of the Members from the West Coast, because I haven't heard mention of the Corner Brook – it seems for a long time that's all you ever heard of, but I haven't heard much about it in a long time, the Corner Brook hospital.

That's a question that person has, what about the Corner Brook hospital. I throw that out there for Members opposite. They may want to comment. Again, this is their question, not mine.

I had another comment and this one was a text, actually, from a constituent. This particular constituent has a big interest and is certainly a strong advocate for persons with disabilities. The issue that he wanted raised, according to him – and maybe we can get confirmation from the Minister of Education on this one, perhaps, if he wants to make a note. If he doesn't, that's fine, but I'm going to ask him anyway.

He is suggesting – and I don't know where he got the information – that the consolidated libraries; we're talking about going to a regional model, I guess. He's suggesting that they're not going to be accessible now. That's what he's suggesting. I don't know if that's true or if it's not true. I don't know where he got that

information. He is suggesting to me in this text that the new regional libraries will not be accessible, or some of them anyway, will not be accessible to persons with disabilities. I would ask is that the case, which I can't believe it would be the case, but is it. If it is, then how could that possibly be and it needs to be changed.

Another issue he wanted raised – and this would be for the Minister of Service NL. This is something that I've raised for a long time and that's the \$400 fine for people parking illegally in blue zones. I had spoken to the minister just after he got sworn in about this. He indicated to me this will be coming forward during this sitting of the House.

Now I don't see it on the Order Paper, so maybe it's coming. He said it was going to be done. I would wonder why it's not on the Order Paper. Of course, that's to make blue zone fines – to raise them to \$400 and not just to deal with it province wide, but also to deal with the issue of on government buildings.

On government buildings, like our parking lot here, there's a special set of regulations covering government buildings and they make their own fines. That should be raised to \$400.

Also, at Memorial University under the *Memorial University Act*, they have the ability to make their own parking fines as well. Currently at MUN, the parking fine for parking in a blue zone is \$20. So people are saying it's just as well to take a chance on \$20, it's cheaper than the metre.

AN HON. MEMBER: That's all it is?

MR. LANE: It's \$20. That's what it is, which is absolutely scandalous.

Again, the thought was that all of these places should be \$400 across the board, no excuses. If you park in a blue zone illegally, that should be your fine.

I had spoken to the Minister of Service NL about all these things. I had actually pointed out the three pieces of legislation, recommended what the changes should be, submitted them. It was my impression this was all going to be done in

this sitting of the House but I don't see anything on the Order Paper. So this advocate wants to know why that's the case.

The final thing he wants to know is we promised, or the government promised – which I guess I was part of at the time – during the campaign to bring in a new disabilities act for the province. In contacting the department responsible now, apparently there's no date of release for this accessibility act. It's in the mandate letter to the minister responsible and apparently there is a big delay because the minister is saying they want to wait and see if the feds are going to do an actual Canada-wide disability act, a national one first. Now that may or may not ever happen. So he has concerns about that.

I know these items are not related to the budget per se, certainly the libraries one would be. The other two, I suppose you could argue it is or it isn't but the point is he is following debate. He did ask me to ask these questions, so that's exactly what I'm doing.

Madam Chair, there are a number of other items I want to speak to as it relates to the actual budget. I have other emails I have to go through, recent ones came in. So I'll wait, and when I get up again I'll ask some more questions and make some more commentary.

Thank you.

CHAIR: The Chair recognizes the hon. Member for Cape St. Francis.

MR. K. PARSONS: Madam Chair, it's indeed a privilege to get up again and represent, like I always say, the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis.

It's been now, I think about 8 o'clock since the last time I spoke. So I'm all ready to go again and say a few more – 8 o'clock this morning since I had the last go. We had a great night here last night. We got a lot of things out, discussed a lot of things about investments in my district, different things that are happening in my district and talking about the budget and where we are. People understand we're on the levy bill, and the levy bill is just part of the budget. Anytime we speak about – which is considered a money bill,

we can talk about anything really. We can talk about different parts of the budget and we can talk about what the effects of the budget are and stuff like that.

It was interesting, I spoke to a friend of mine while I was on the way home. He gave me a call and said: Kevin, how are you doing? We were talking about it and he was watching it last night. I said, I can't believe it. He said yes, I watched it a couple of times. He talked about different things I got up and said. He said you were up this morning you were talking about the promises that were broken and stuff like that. He said, you didn't mention one.

The one that really bugged him the most was a promise that was made in the House of Assembly that the public would be notified about the budget and when the vote on the budget would come down. He said he was looking forward to that because he had planned to come in. He comes in every now and then. He had planned to come in for that.

He said I watched Question Period one day and the Leader of the Opposition got up and asked the Premier point blank, will you notify the general public when the budget vote is coming down? He said it was pretty quick. Give them 24 hours' notice is what he said. He said the Premier got up and said yes I will.

The question was simple. It wasn't tell the Opposition or put something on a piece of paper or send an email. It was to notify the public. The problem that we're having right now in Newfoundland and Labrador is all about, what I consider is trust. It's trust in the government. When people say something – and maybe they don't mean it. Maybe you have to read between the lines. Maybe you have to look at it and say, okay, I thought he was going to say that. Maybe he didn't mean that. People are not stunned. They understand that – and people do understand.

That's a word that's used a lot in the House of Assembly, people don't understand. But they do understand, and that was a simple little promise. Now, of all the promises that were broken, like the HST and no layoffs, and the one where he was going to release all the reports from the Justice Department on severance for the Nalcor

CEO, that was the one promise that really affected somebody. I was amazed by that, because he follows politics like you wouldn't believe. He said that was the one promise, because he said it was so clear. It wasn't something that needed to – it would have given people the opportunity to come in, people who really wanted to be here. Maybe it wouldn't have packed the place or whatever, maybe someone might want to go outside if they had the opportunity, but they were promised they would get 24-hour notice.

I know it's a small thing and maybe it is small, but it's amazing, people look at that and they look at the trust factor. They say: How can I trust this government when a simple promise to notify us, just give us notification, no big deal, the vote is coming down tomorrow at 2 o'clock or the vote is coming down tomorrow at 3 o'clock, not send an email and say we may do it tomorrow, to the Opposition.

It was funny, the House Leader across the way, he's a nice fellow and everything else. I have a lot of respect for him. His idea was well, we notified you guys. You should have done it. That's a common theme in government today that it's always someone else and someone else and someone else.

I think that's a huge part of what's happening today in Newfoundland and Labrador. We see it on the *Open Line* shows. We see it in the polls. We see it all over the place. I don't mean the poles that are out in front of Confederation Building either because they had the signs taken down the other night. I think some are put back up again.

AN HON. MEMBER: They're all taken down again.

MR. K. PARSONS: They're all taken down again now?

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. K. PARSONS: Oh, no, they're not taken down again. I was sure there was a white van going around the building here last night. So I wasn't sure what that –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. K. PARSONS: I saw the Minister of Transportation leave here one time last night and it was pretty suspicious to tell you the truth. I don't know where he was gone to, but I was pretty suspicious when I saw the Minister of Transportation sneak out through the door. That was 3 this morning too, I think it was.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. K. PARSONS: Yes, the price is gone up too. It's \$400 to take them down now, I do believe. Actually, that's not that funny. It's sad that people want to express their – they have their right.

I believe the Premier yesterday when he got up and said he had nothing to do with it. I do believe him on that because I can't see anybody doing something so stupid really, to be honest with you, because it would be a stupid move for anyone to make.

We live in a country where there is freedom of speech and freedom of expression. We celebrate the 100th anniversary of Beaumont-Hamel every day in the House of Assembly. We stand up and give recognition. It's a great gesture. I'm glad we're doing it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: Those are things that people – it's a right we have. Whatever happened there, I do believe it was a mistake and should never have happened in the first place. I know the Premier wouldn't do something like that because, like I said, to take down those signs, resign, he wouldn't do something like that.

MR. JOYCE: Mini-me would have done it.

MR. K. PARSONS: Mini-me probably would have done it, no doubt about it. Minister of Municipal Affairs, I can't say what I was going to say to tell you the truth.

AN HON. MEMBER: Unparliamentary.

MR. K. PARSONS: No, it wouldn't have been unparliamentary. It wouldn't be nice, that's all.

Those are the things that people are doing. I listened to the guy on the news last night. He was talking about all the people now that want these signs for their windows and for their lawns. That's unfortunate that we're in this situation today that we're finding that.

The problem is that it's all about trust. The general public, people that elected us, have to trust us. It's bad for – I'll always go back to my dad as a politician. When I was a young guy, there would be people saying stuff about politicians. The one thing I'd always say, well, I know one honest politician. I know one politician that is an honest man and that was my father. You'd hear people give us so much of how politicians are this and politicians are that.

It's unfortunate because that's what's happening today here in Newfoundland and Labrador. The general public doesn't have any trust. I guess it goes back to you have to earn trust too. You have to earn the trust of the electorate. You have to earn the trust of the people.

When the people see that things are happening and they're promised one thing and the direct opposite happens – like when you go on a campaign trail and you say HST is a job killer, not on my watch will that get changed, there will be no layoffs. I guess people feel betrayed. That's a word that I heard a couple of times the weekend. People feel betrayed because they were led down the garden path, is what you can say.

I listened to the *Open Line* host one morning. He was saying that there was no need of promising all these things because it was obvious that the times in Newfoundland – people wanted change. The voters are always right. No matter what they do, they're always right. I strongly believe that.

I know that as a politician, as a Member for the District of Cape St. Francis, my bosses are the people in Cape St. Francis. The people I have to answer to more so than anything else are the people in Cape St. Francis. They're right no matter what decision they make.

During the election, they felt that I was a good representative and they put me back here. I'm very pleased for it. I thank them for that, I really do. When you go out and you talk to people,

they want to have their opinion, they want to be able to express their opinion and they want their opinion to be listened to. I'm watching here in the House of Assembly in the last month or so where I saw Members of the government party present petitions. I saw a petition with 1,050 names on it presented here in the House of Assembly against a clinic that was going to be closed down. Those are your bosses. Those are the people that elected you.

Now to present a petition and say here you go, here's a petition – it's time to stand up for the people that elected you. I think that's another part, when I talk about trust, that the people in Newfoundland and Labrador they are pretty smart when it comes to politics. They are really, really smart when it comes to politics. They know what they want from their politicians. They know that they want their politicians to stand up for them. They want to their politicians to say listen, my voice is heard.

We heard it last night and then we got ridiculed a bit this morning, how Members on this side all read out different emails. Now the emails, some were saying, oh, they were a month ago. But that was a great thing because people had the opportunity to have their email read here last night in the House of Assembly. It's a voice that they had. It's the voice that the people have.

That's what we are; we are the voice of the people. We're the voice that people listen to –

CHAIR: Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member his time for speaking has expired.

The Chair recognizes the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: Madam Chair, I move that the Committee rise report the resolution of Bill 14 and ask leave to sit again.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

The motion is carried.

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

MR. SPEAKER (Osborne): The hon. the Deputy Speaker.

MS. DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Ways and Means have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report that they have made some progress and ask leave to sit again.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair of the Committee of Ways and Means reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have made progress and have directed her to ask leave to sit again.

When shall the report be received?

MR. A. PARSONS: Now.

On motion, report received and adopted.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, Mr. Speaker, given the hour of the day, I move, seconded by the Minister of Education that the House do now adjourn until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

This House now stands adjourned – I guess a few minutes ago being Monday – until 1:30 today.

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