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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.

We would like to welcome to the public gallery today Mayor Derm Flynn from the Town of Appleton. Welcome, Mayor Flynn.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: As well. I've been notified of a birthday here in the House today, so I know Question Period will be rather pleasant and festive. It's the Opposition House Leader's birthday.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: For Members' statements today, we have the Members for the Districts of Harbour Main, Cape St. Francis, Harbour Grace – Port de Grave, Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune, Conception Bay South and Virginia Waters – Pleasantville.

The hon. the Member for the District of Harbour Main.

MS. PARSLEY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to congratulate the volunteers and staff that made this year's Crystal Carnival in the Town of Holyrood such a great success.

The 2017 carnival took place from February 17 to 26 and saw hundreds of residents and visitors converge on the town to take part in the festivities. This included things such as an ice-carving demonstration, a dinner and dance, bingo games, snow-bubble soccer and truffle dipping with the Newfoundland Chocolate Company – which I hear was a great success.

In addition, the Crystal dip saw many participants take a plunge into the icy waters of Holyrood in support of the K-Rock Children's Trust Fund.

The carnival demonstrates to all that a willing group of hard-working volunteers can turn their

hands to anything and make it a great success. It is events like the Crystal Carnival that make our communities such a great place to live, work and play.

I ask all Members to join me in congratulating this year's organizers of the Holyrood Crystal Carnival and send them best wishes for the years to come.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I rise in this hon. House today to congratulate Kaitlyn Dalton of Flatrock on winning a writing competition with her speech, "What Canada Means to Me."

Kaitlyn is a grade eight student at Holy Trinity High in Torbay. She is also a very proud Canadian who clearly loves her country and all that it stands for. Based on her entry, Kaitlyn was selected as one of four finalists taken to CBC studios to tape their speeches. A week later, Kaitlyn was notified that she had been selected as the winner.

Winning the competition provided Kaitlyn with the opportunity to present her speech in front of thousands of people who had gathered at St. John's City Hall this past New Year's Eve to celebrate Canada's 150th birthday. No doubt, this was a very proud moment for Kaitlyn, her family, her school and her community.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in commending Kaitlyn for her winning speech and for the pride she has in our country.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Harbour Grace – Port de Grave.

MS. P. PARSONS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's great to be back.

Today I stand to recognize outstanding volunteer, Ms. Dianne Trenchard of Bay Roberts. Following retirement from the Provincial Information and Library Resources Board, Dianne offered to help run an auction and was subsequently offered a seat on the board of directors of the Bay Roberts Cultural Foundation. This foundation is a non-for-profit, registered, charitable organization established to preserve and sustain the traditions and practices of outport life for present and future generations.

Currently, the foundation is raising money towards a Regional Performing Arts and Wellness Centre. Every week, Dianne set up the legion for Chase the Ace, lines up the entertainment and runs the 50/50. She is a firm believer in giving back and paying it forward.

Reader's Digest recently name Bay Roberts as one of the top 10 places to spend Christmas, and Dianne says volunteers played a huge role in making this happen.

Ms. Trenchard is this year's recipient of the Christine Bussey, Most Spirited Award. This recognition was created as a legacy in memory of a beautiful soul, who was a dedicated volunteer in the town. It is presented to a member of a committee directly involved with the town's departments of tourism and recreation.

Colleagues, please join me in congratulations.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is indeed a pleasure for me to rise today and pay tribute to the remarkable firefighters, first responders, Lions members, countless volunteers and community groups that make my district distinctly South Coast Strong.

Recent disasters and tragic events have borne witness that residents along this coast truly epitomize the characteristics of perseverance, kindness and camaraderie that all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are famous for. Our community spirit, along with our ability

to respond effectively to the urgent and ongoing needs of residents, following the unprecedented events of Hurricane Matthew and the recent fires that destroyed our public buildings has been truly extraordinary.

Looking back on how we weathered these storms together brings a great sense of pride. Today, it is an honour to recognize our South Coast Strong volunteers who rallied so admirably in response to adversity. We know you are always working steadfastly every day, and we thank you for being the very heart of our communities.

I ask that all hon. Members join me in congratulating and thanking our South Coast Strong volunteers. This is a tough one today, because it's been emotional for us. It's incredible how much we can accomplish when we work so harmoniously and courageously together.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to inform my hon. colleagues about an exceptional individual from my district who has been named one of the best principals in the country. David Locke, the principal of Holy Spirit High School, Conception Bay South, is among 40 people across the country listed among Canada's Outstanding Principals.

David Locke has received national recognition for his work as an educator. The Learning Partnerships news release said David Locke is a leader who builds trust with his staff, students and the broader school community. He is intentionally visibly in the halls and classrooms of Holy Spirit High School, interacting and connecting with his 900 students, often referring to them by name.

Since his arrival, the graduation rate at Holy Spirit has consistently been near or at the top of the province. Additionally, the percentage of

students in the non-academic stream has been decreasing.

Principals are nominated for Canada's Outstanding Principals list by their colleagues, school staff and community members. The Learning Partnership is a national charity dedicated to supporting, promoting and advancing publicly-funded education in Canada.

I ask all Members to join me in congratulating Mr. David Locke on being selected as one of Canada's Outstanding Principals.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I rise today in this hon. House to highlight an incredible event that was held at the Masjid-an-Noor mosque in Virginia Waters – Pleasantville on Feb 3.

The Human Shield – Protect Our Mosques event, organized by Gobhina Nagarajah, saw hundreds of people turn out in solidarity with our Muslim community here in St. John's to denounce Islamophobia and bigotry.

It was an honour for me to attend this event and speak to the members of MANAL and those who came out to show support. The turnout at the event makes it clear that hate will never overshadow the strength of our community in this city or this province.

MANAL does an excellent job of acting as a bridge in our community and I want to thank, personally, Dr. Pirzada, and the rest of MANAL for their hard work, acting as a refuge and a source of strength for many in a very difficult time.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in declaring that the horrifying acts of terror and violence in Quebec City cannot become the norm. Now, more than ever, we must stand up and say we reject Islamophobia. We reject racism. In

Newfoundland and Labrador, we welcome everybody.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

MR. BYRNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to express my sincere condolences on behalf of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to the family of Dr. Angus Bruneau, whose work and whose generosity impacted so many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Mr. Speaker, among his many accomplishments, Dr. Bruneau served as the founding Dean of Memorial University's Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science, and helped establish the Canadian Academy of Engineering. He also founded Fortis Incorporated and served as the company's president and CEO for almost a full decade.

Throughout his life, Dr. Bruneau endeavoured to give back to his community, to his province and to his country. Together, with his wife, Jean, they donated millions of dollars to many causes including providing support to Memorial University of Newfoundland.

Their contributions to the university have resulted in the creation of the Angus Bruneau Student Leadership and Innovation Fund in Engineering and the Bruneau Centre for Excellence in Choral Music. In 2011, Memorial University renamed the Inco Innovation Centre in his honour.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members of the House of Assembly to join with me today as we remember Dr. Bruneau's contributions to Newfoundland and Labrador and extend our deepest sympathies to his wife, Jean, to his entire family and to his huge network of friends.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. We join with government and all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in expressing condolences, as well as our gratitude, to the late Dr. Angus Bruneau and his family.

Mr. Speaker, Dr. Bruneau has had an immense impact on our country, province, its institutions and its people. Together with his wife, Jean, they gave unselfishly to numerous worthy projects and causes, benefiting so many people along the way and certainly will continue well into the future. As the minister alluded to, our province's university was a major recipient of this generosity and, through their charitable acts, the Bruneau legacy will live on well into the future.

On behalf of the Official Opposition, I wish to pass along our sympathies to the family and offer thanks to Dr. Bruneau's massive contributions to Newfoundland and Labrador.

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 very much, Mr. Speaker.

I'm very pleased to stand and join with the minister and my colleague from the Official Opposition in offering condolences to the family of Dr. Angus Bruneau. The arts were indeed among his greatest passions. As the minister noted, he and his wife, Jean, donated \$1 million to Memorial to fund, among other things, the Bruneau Centre for Excellence in Choral Music. This donation was the largest made by a private citizen in the university's history. He was also founding chair of Festival 500.

Thanks to Angus Bruneau.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to announce that during Violence Awareness Week, 38 schools were recognized for their efforts in achieving safe, caring and inclusive learning environments, promoting positive school climates and sustaining safe and caring communities.

To help with these efforts, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development provided \$20,000 shared between 38 schools through the Safe and Caring Schools Special Project Awards.

Mr. Speaker, ensuring the students of Newfoundland and Labrador have a positive, safe and caring environment in which to learn is a key priority for this government. Our Safe and Caring Schools Policy helps to establish this climate.

As part of Violence Prevention Week, K-12 students from across the province participated in various activities to promote Pink Shirt Day. This year, students were asked to think about a "Pink Shirt Promise" they could make to combat bullying. I was fortunate to participate in one such event at St. Francis of Assisi School in Outer Cove and I was amazed at the enthusiasm and the level of understanding on display. It was quite impressive. We created important awareness that bullying is not acceptable and we all play a role in preventing it.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members of this House to join me in congratulating this year's recipients of this year's Safe and Caring Schools Special Project Awards. A complete list of this year's award winners can be found on the department's website.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. We would also like to recognize the 38 schools identified that went above and beyond for their efforts in achieving safe, caring and inclusive learning environments as well as promoting safe and caring communities.

Mr. Speaker, while I'm happy to hear the minister recognize this day and the participants, with pending layoffs on the horizon, cuts to inclusive learning around the corner and recent cuts to government's Violence Prevention Initiative, I have to wonder what this government's plan is for the province.

Mr. Speaker, while I critique this minister and his government, I sincerely wish to congratulate this year's recipients of Safe and Caring Schools Special Project Awards. Keep up the great work. Trusting this group of students and educators can help create positive change in our schools, community and in our 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 very much, Mr. Speaker.

And I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. I'm happy to recognize the 38 schools that the minister has recognized and the many other schools who put so much effort into creating a culture of safety and inclusion, but I urge the minister to ensure that government puts in place all the resources these schools and others need to create safe and inclusive environments for all students.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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.

It's good to be back in the House of Assembly. As we come back to the House of Assembly today it's clear, there is a trust deficit with this Premier and his government

Mr. Speaker, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have lost faith in our government. Many times they have told the people that things are going to be a certain way and very soon after to find out that things are very different, and this has been an ongoing pattern.

In November, the Premier stated that there was no discussion occurring with Quebec or Hydro-Québec that they were involved in. He went as far as to say none whatsoever.

So I ask the Premier: Do you stand by that statement?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do.

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

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

Well, I'll ask the Premier this: Can you confirm, Premier, that Quebec government wrote your government in May 2016 and requested a meeting to discuss energy, more precisely the electrical sector and possibly partnership opportunities?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

No, I can't.

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

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

I can tell you, it was through an ATIPP request that we filed that it was discovered that a letter had been sent to the government. And, in fact, there's a trail of emails that includes the Premier's email to being copied in the letter.

So I'll ask the Premier: Can you tell this House of Assembly today, is it accurate and correct that you received a letter from Quebec, from the Province of Quebec, and asking to have discussions on the electricity sector?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have not seen the letter that the former premier is talking about. I'll check with the officials and see where this is. But, Mr. Speaker, I've always said, if there's a deal that could be made for the benefit of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, regardless if it's with Nova Scotia, whoever it is, we'll explore those options, Mr. Speaker. So I'll check and see where this information is coming from.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Well, it's the Quebec Minister of Natural Resources, Pierre Arcand, who stood last year and publicly made comments that there was discussions happening between the Government of Quebec and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. Interestingly enough, Mr. Speaker, this letter is signed by the same Quebec minister.

So I'll ask the Premier again: What was your government's response to the letter to the Minister of Quebec who had asked for those discussions?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, the Leader of the Opposition in that letter that he's referring to, if memory serves me correct, it was basically referring to the discussion that he had with the Leader of the Opposition. That is what he was talking about.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

PREMIER BALL: This goes back to the discussion that was had in St. John's at the Council of the Federation, Mr. Speaker. It was very clear that the Leader of the Opposition right now had those discussions. I'm not sure how far they went. This came up just last year in this House of Assembly, Mr. Speaker. But clearly, right now, if there's a deal that can be made with any province, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick or if it's with Quebec, Mr. Speaker, and it's in the best interest of Newfoundland and Labrador, why would we not explore those options?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Before I recognize the hon. the Leader of the Opposition, the rules in this Legislature are very clearly established and my expectation that Members will follow the rules is very clearly established. The only person I wish to hear speaking is the person that I've recognized to speak.

The hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

What's really interesting about this letter is not only did he receive a letter about the discussions that Quebec was having with the Premier, the current Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador, but not only that, the Premier extended the conversations to Premier Wynne of Ontario, Mr. Speaker. Because the email trail that we received for the Access to Information indicates from the chief of staff that he discussed it with the Premier and the Premier told him he had spoken to Premier Wynne in Winnipeg and they chatted about this. They actually had a discussion about this.

So I say Premier, when you say you're not having discussions, were you also having discussions with Premier Wynne?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In terms of any discussion with Ontario, the only thing I recall that could have been talked about there was the free flow of electricity with the Canadian free trade agreement that we were negotiating. And, of course, it was something that was important for us, as it's important for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians as part of the free flow of electricity; something, Mr. Speaker, I would say that all previous administrations said was important to our province. They could never get this to the appropriate table. So right now there's a process that's ongoing for the Canadian free trade agreement that would allow, potentially allow for the free flow of electricity through Quebec.

So that was a discussion that involved Ontario, I would say, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, the federal government was also involved in that as well, as they recognize that for provinces to properly extract the natural resources that they would have in their jurisdictions, for Newfoundland and Labrador that was something that we were looking for.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: What we have here, Mr. Speaker, is we have the minister from Quebec who's clearly on the record as saying they were having discussions with the Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador. We have discussions happening at meetings where Premier Wynne and the Premier – the Liberal Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador were having discussions about this, and in so far – as far as to go as the Premier of Ontario asked for a copy of the letter.

So I'll ask the Premier again: Did you actually send a copy of the letter to Premier Wynne? Do

you all of a sudden now know what this is about?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Right now, as I said to the Member opposite now on a couple of occasions. The discussion that we had with Ontario, and with other provinces, I would say, Mr. Speaker, because this was part of the Canadian free trade agreement – as part of that, we had taken the position that we were interested in having a free flow of electricity through Quebec that would open up the rest of the country, I would say, for electricity out of Labrador, out of Labrador projects. And, Mr. Speaker, we see that as a good thing. As a matter of fact, I think all administrations would see that as something positive.

The discussions that the Leader of the Opposition is now talking about are the discussions that occurred in 2015 in St. John's with the former premier at the Council of Federation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. P. DAVIS: Not the case, Mr. Speaker, and we'll get to that.

I want to ask the Minister of Natural Resources: This letter was couriered to you; did you share it with the Premier?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I believe the Member opposite is referring to discussions around the Agreement on Internal Trade. As the Premier has indicated, there were discussions and there are ongoing discussions on the Agreement on Internal Trade which centers around the free flow of electricity across this country. Something that's very important, not

only in Newfoundland and Labrador, but I would say, Mr. Speaker, to nation building. And that is the nature of the discussions that we've ever had around this issue.

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.

It doesn't answer the question, if she actually shared it with the Premier or not. We know the minister has a problem sometimes sharing information with the Premier. We want to know if she shared this letter.

The letter clearly articulates, Mr. Speaker, very clearly articulates a desire for the establishment of a business partnership between our two provinces in relation to future developments in the domain of energy and, more precisely, the electrical sector.

We asked the Premier very clearly last year if there were any discussions taking place. The minister of Quebec says there is. The Premier stood in his place and said there was not.

I ask the Premier: Why were you not open and transparent with the people of Newfoundland and Labrador?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There are no discussions ongoing with the Province of Quebec related to future developments in Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, we've had, as I said, as part of the Agreement on Internal Trade, the Canadian free trade agreement, about the free flow of electricity through Quebec. We see that as a good thing, Mr. Speaker. If we are able to get to that, Mr. Speaker, it would open up a huge window of opportunity for us as a province.

Now, with that said, we already know that with the current Muskrat Falls Project there might be some opportunities within Nova Scotia, but, Mr. Speaker, the current situation that we have in our province right now, whatever opportunity exists for us as a province to bring economic benefits so that we can provide social programs to this province, I'm willing to have that discussion but that discussion is not something that's ongoing.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

In the information received in the Access to Information request that wasn't disclosed by the Premier, there's also an email here back to May 12 which was sent to the Premier which indicates as well that the new CEO of Nalcor was going to be copied on this as well.

So I'll ask the Premier this: What discussions has the new CEO of Nalcor had about energy assets and partnerships with the Province of Quebec?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can't speak to what discussions the new CEO would have had with Nalcor, but I will tell you this, the CEO of Nalcor right now, just like every Member on this side of the House of Assembly, is very concerned about rate mitigation in this province. They are very concerned that the current project at Muskrat Falls would lead this province to be paying in excess of 22 cents a kilowatt hour for electricity, Mr. Speaker. That's as a result of decisions they had made.

So if the CEO is having discussions with any particular jurisdiction in a way to actually provide rate mitigation for people in our province, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage him to do so.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

It's our understanding that back to February 10, 2016, the talks of Newfoundland partnering with Quebec were initiated, at that time, at an Energy Ministers' meeting. So I ask the minister: Can you confirm this?

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

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

I have met Mr. Arcand once at an energy meeting in August of last year. We have lots of discussions around energy. The discussion I believe the hon. Member is looking for is around the agreement on internal trade. At our energy table, we do discuss concerns around making sure that energy is available in the North. We talk about movement of electricity. There are lots of things spoken about at the table, but nothing in particular between Newfoundland and Labrador and Quebec.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, last week the Auditor General concluded that the former CEO of Nalcor was constructively dismissed. The Premier has said repeatedly that he resigned. I ask the Premier, which one is correct, in your opinion?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would say that the words of the former CEO of Nalcor is correct. In his own words, he said he was stepping down from Nalcor. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, going back to the report that

the Member is talking about, I fully co-operated with the AG. The AG has said that, Mr. Speaker. He has said that I certainly did not mislead the people of this province.

It's the subsequent days that came after this which is extremely interesting because it was the board of Nalcor that on Thursday, two days after the Tuesday meeting, the board of Nalcor – this is publicly available information, so I'm guessing the Members opposite would have this. On Thursday, it was the board that asked the former CEO: Oh, by the way, when was your employment with Nalcor – when was it finished? When did you cease employment with Nalcor, Mr. Speaker? So clearly, it was not something that happened at our Tuesday night meeting.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So I never got an answer to that question, so I'll as the Premier, quite simply, do you agree with the Auditor General's conclusion that Mr. Martin was constructively dismissed? Yes or no, please.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, the AG has come to a conclusion that based on the information that led up to Mr. Martin's termination, the cessation of employment, when he decided to leave, that there was enough information that would consider to be constructively dismissed. That was a separate issue then how the man, after, had left his employment.

Two separate issues, Mr. Speaker. It was the board of Nalcor basically saying that we terminated him. There's nothing in his contract – the contract was designed by the prior administration – nothing in that contract that would ever contemplate a premier or this government dismissing or terminating the employment of the former CEO, Mr. Speaker. That was done clearly by the board.

The AG concluded that based on the information that led up to this, there was a case for constructive dismissal, which led to the severance payment, Mr. Speaker. If we look at the emails that are publicly available right now, it is very clear the board was asking Mr. Martin when his employment (inaudible).

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To the Premier: There's no separation between the termination of Mr. Martin and the issues in regarding as to what transpired and what caused that to happen. They are all linked; that's what the Auditor General had said.

So I'd ask the Premier again: Please explain to us why you don't agree with the Auditor General's recommendation on what transpired and what caused the termination of Mr. Martin.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

What caused the termination of Mr. Martin was Mr. Martin himself. As a matter of fact, it was the board that reached out to Mr. Martin and asked him when, when is it that your termination with your employer, with Nalcor, when is it that you had left – as a matter of fact, he went on to say that we would prefer that you stayed on all of Wednesday so that you could participate in the board meetings.

So, Mr. Martin, on Wednesday morning, he went to work. Mr. Martin went to work on Wednesday morning, fully participated in a board meeting. The following day, Nalcor, the officials at Nalcor, asked Mr. Martin: By the way, when did you leave Nalcor? Do you have anything in writing to government? The answer was no. If there wasn't anything in writing, well, we would like you to have your termination effective the end of business day on Wednesday.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Auditor General recognized very clearly that due diligence wasn't done in the execution of the contract. The Minister of Finance, the former chair of Nalcor, was aware of the employment contract for the CEO, so I ask the Minister of Finance: Why didn't you inform the Premier about the termination clauses and the implications of some of the decisions that transpired?

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

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

The Member opposite asked this question earlier in the session and I provided an answer at that time. The answer is that as a former director of the board at Nalcor, I have fiduciary responsibility to maintain the privacy of information that I would have received in fulfilling that role. I have legal opinions verifying that and if the Member opposite would like to see those legal opinions, certainly, as I said last fall, on ongoing questions, I'd be happy to provide him that.

But if the Member opposite is suggesting that as a Minister of the Crown I break the law, I would inform him that I do not have any intention to do so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I understand fully the fiduciary responsibility in regard to chair of the board, but I'll ask the minister: As Minister of Finance, the minister responsible for the President of Treasury Board and part of the executive of government, does she think she would be entitled to see Mr. Martin's contract in holding that position? Why wouldn't you have asked for a copy of the contract?

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

MS. C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, as the Member opposite would certainly be familiar; the contract that was with Mr. Martin would have been a contract between the company of Nalcor and Mr. Martin.

In my role, I do not have access to – nor have I had access to – contracts for CEOs of Crown corporations. Those contracts are with the boards of directors. And I would remind the Member opposite, that the continuing reference from the Member's office, including the Leader of the Official Opposition, in that I somehow had access to provide that information to this government and they would request that I break the law – break my fiduciary responsibility – is something that is quite unacceptable.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Mr. Speaker, we understand the Minister of Natural Resources had a copy and the Premier had a copy. I'm not sure why the Minister of Finance wouldn't have a copy and want to review it in her role.

Mr. Speaker, the AG stated that the Minister of Natural Resources requested a copy of the CEO contract and sent it to the Premier's office, or the Premier's Chief of Staff.

I ask the Minister: Did you read the contract before you sent it? And, again, did you review it for the termination clause and what the cost could be for the implications?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

And I'd like to thank, publicly, the Auditor General for his comprehensive review of this matter. I think he took a long time to deliberate on these issues and make his conclusions.

Mr. Speaker, regarding the contract; I told this House on June 1 that I had a copy of the

contract, requested a copy of the contract on March 3. I requested the same following a Treasury Board meeting, discussing the finances of Nalcor and I thought it was responsible of the Minister of Natural Resources to have a copy. I did review it at the time. I absolutely did, and I then filed it. Because of course, Mr. Speaker, and as we've said repeatedly and has been indicated by the Auditor General, the contract of the CEO of Nalcor rests with the board.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So the minister said she reviewed it on March 3. So based on that review, did she have an understanding of what the termination clauses were? And, in her opinion, was this constructive dismissal?

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

MS. COADY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will speak to the Auditor General's report. The Auditor General did say in his report, and I'm just going to read from page 19 where he said: the only explicit decision made by the Premier at the April 19 meeting was that he could not provide the public support asked for by Mr. Martin.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this government has been reviewing the Muskrat Falls Project, has done an awful lot of work with EY to ensure the cost – we understand the cost benefits and associated risks of the Muskrat Falls Project. We have put in place and expanded a very well-experienced board of directors, really, a stellar board of directors.

Mr. Speaker, we have concluded our discussions around the Astaldi contract. Mr. Speaker, we have negotiated an extension to the loan guarantee. There has been a lot of work that we have done to ensure that the Muskrat Falls Project is on track.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Mr. Speaker, the AG stated that due diligence, as I indicated, was ignored by pretty well all concerned.

I ask the Premier: Is he okay with the fact that two ministers, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Natural Resources, did not apply due diligence as suggested by the Auditor General? And is he okay that the work done, that should have been done, hadn't taken place in regard to the termination?

AN HON. MEMBER: Good question.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, the AG's report clearly says it does not contemplate any consideration where government would terminate the employment of the former CEO.

What happened, Mr. Speaker, is very clear. When the board met on Wednesday, April 20, they had three things in their agenda. One was the bonuses of the management team. Secondly, was to review the employment contract of the former CEO. Mr. Speaker, the third thing was to bolt for the door on Friday.

So they were clearly interested – not interested in looking after the well-being. They clearly, as the AG said, they could've stayed or they could've left this contract to a new incoming board. They refused to do that.

They put in place a settlement agreement with much discussion, I would say, with the former CEO, not with government. This is a contract that was clearly administered by the board, Mr. Speaker. It was their decision to terminate the employment.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I understand from the Auditor General, the Premier and the Minister of Natural Resources sat in a room when the decision was actually made.

I ask the Premier: When did you first have discussions with Stan Marshall on taking over the CEO position?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I take exception to what the Member is saying about when he was dismissed. He clearly was not dismissed. Why would an individual who is CEO of a major corporation, Nalcor, go to work the next morning if he was dismissed the night before? Why would the board of Nalcor be writing emails to the former CEO on Thursday, two days after, asking: Oh, by the way, did you write anything to government about the cessation of your employment? When do you believe your employment ended? If you haven't put anything in correspondence, can you make it for the end of day Wednesday so that we could have a full complement for board participation?

So, clearly, it was between Mr. Martin and the board that put the measures in place for the termination of that employment.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So I'll ask the Premier again: When did you first have discussion with Stan Marshall about taking over the CEO position of Nalcor?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I met with Mr. Marshall on Monday morning, April 18, and that meeting was set up based on a prior conversation that I had many weeks ago with Mr. Marshall. He's a gentleman

that I have had discussions with in the past. He's had tremendous expertise in this field. And the discussion on Monday morning, on April 18, set up from a previous conversation, was about board governance.

It was later that day that I called Mr. Marshall, as outlined in the AG's report there, and we had a discussion about the future of Nalcor, if indeed I could not come to a resolution with the CEO.

Mr. Speaker, let's not forget that I did everything possible to actually support Mr. Martin and keeping him there. It was the ultimatum that he put to this government that put us in the very difficult situation, either you be a cheerleader for me or I will leave. I could not do that, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Opposition House Leader, for a very quick question.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That's certainly what the AG has said if read the report, I'd say to the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier just articulated how involved he was with the hiring of Stan Marshall, but he claims to be hands off when it came to the termination of the former CEO.

I ask him to explain to the people of the province, what's the difference. It's the same board, the same public entity, why so different rules?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If you go back to when Mr. Martin was put in place, it was very clear then that it was the administration of the day that actually put Mr. Martin in place. As a matter of fact, what was very interesting, Mr. Speaker, when I reviewed the information that's now publicly available, back in 2009 with the renewal of the contract for Mr. Martin, it took nearly six months. The board took the due diligence and the proper time that it

was required, six months, to renew a contract, Mr. Speaker, but it took literally hours to put a settlement agreement in place to actually terminate the employment of Mr. Martin.

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.

Last fall's fiscal update projected the provincial unemployment rate to rise to 19.6 per cent by 2019, up six points from the current rate. *The Way Forward* document, government's vision for sustainability and growth, sets targets for just about everything except jobs.

I ask the Premier: May we assume that a drastically increased unemployment rate is the jobs target of this government?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, needless to say that when you look at the province right now, coming off of three mega projects that are currently coming to a conclusion, Mr. Speaker, they are difficult times for this province. It's unprecedented in our history. We know that, Mr. Speaker. And I would say again that there was very little planning, very little management, put in place to actually prepare this province for where we are today.

That is the reason why we are making a significant investment into infrastructure in this province, Mr. Speaker. We are looking and we've had significant discussions on new opportunities. Economic diversification is well underway.

So it's our job right now to do the best job that we can do putting jobs in place, in particular in some of the rural communities in our province, Mr. Speaker. There's certainly lots of interest now in Labrador West. We're seeing significant opportunities offshore.

We are taking –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

PREMIER BALL: – the job situation in our province seriously.

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.

The Government of Alberta didn't lose its nerve in the face of tough economic circumstances. Their budget was called the Alberta Jobs Plan, and they are now projected to lead the country this year in economic growth.

I ask the Premier: Where is the Newfoundland and Labrador jobs plan? I just don't want words; I'd like him to answer.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, the Member opposite is saying you want words; you want an answer. Well, I would suspect that the Member opposite would do some research, Mr. Speaker, and see a very big difference in what's happening in Alberta than what's happening in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Alberta, a province of literally zero debt and cash in the bank on a per-capita basis; Newfoundland and Labrador at the other end of the spectrum, Mr. Speaker, with the highest amount of debt per capita. The situation is very different in Alberta than it is in Newfoundland and Labrador, I say.

So I'd encourage the Member opposite, before you get up and put this in a situation comparing Newfoundland and Labrador to Alberta, to get your facts straight and you will see a much different situation in our province than it is in Alberta.

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.

We've just lost 287 non-bargaining unit positions in this public service.

I ask the Premier: How many indirect and induced job losses does he expect will occur in the private sector as a result of these layoffs? Did he do his research?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I again encourage the Member opposite to do some research. In her election platform last year when it was her own leader, it was her own leader – that is looking for a job, by the way, from what I hear. It was her own leader that made mention that he was actually going to reduce significantly the size of the Executive Council and so on. So job cuts were also part of their election plan, I say, Mr. Speaker.

This is very difficult times for our province, Mr. Speaker, and we really value the work that the public sector has done. But when you look at where we are in terms of putting in sustainable jobs for the public sector, what we did last week was something that I don't – none of us on this side of the House, none of us would enjoy doing this. But adding the sustainability to those that are left and those public sector employees was also very important to us. Putting in place a correct balance is something that we will always strive for.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre, for a quick question.

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Justice: What can he do to help restore confidence and trust in our provincial police service, and can he give us an update on his proposed pilot program for free legal advice to sexual assault complainants in criminal matters?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

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

And I thank the Member opposite for the question. I have every confidence in the police forces of this province, the women and men that do this job day in and day out. And I say this as it relates to police forces or doctors, or politicians or lawyers we will not let the actions of one tar and feather the actions of the rest who do good work on a day-to-day basis. I maintain my confidence in them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. A. PARSONS: That being said, we have to be allowed to ask questions, and that's what people do. We want to see that leadership provided. We've seen a situation where the public is upset and we will continue to ask questions, but I will support the men and women doing this job.

As it relates to the sexual assault response pilot program, I'd be happy to inform this House that I'll have news on that very shortly. It's something that we are very proud of and looking forward to providing an update in the very near future.

Thank you.

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 Minister of Environment – actually, it's a new department.

The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MR. TRIMPER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I give notice that I will ask leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Public Safety Act, Bill 67.

MR. SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

The hon. the Minister of Service NL.

MR. TRIMPER: Mr. Speaker, I also give notice that I will ask leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Highway Traffic Act No. 5, Bill 68.

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

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

I give notice that I will ask leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Financial Administration Act No. 3, Bill 66.

And also, Mr. Speaker, if I might, I give notice that I will ask leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Financial Administration Act No. 2, Bill 65.

MR. SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

The hon. the Minister of Health and Community Services.

MR. HAGGIE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I give notice that I will ask leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Health Professions Act, Bill 69.

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

MS. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise to give notice that I will move the following private Member's resolution, seconded by my colleague, the hon. Member for Burin – Grand Bank.

WHEREAS only 34 female MHAs have been elected in Newfoundland and Labrador since 1930; and

WHEREAS as of June 2016, only 22.8 per cent of all national parliamentarians were women; and

WHEREAS the recent Daughters of the Vote event saw significant interest among women across the province to become involved in political and leadership roles;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House urges the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to encourage increased participation of women in leadership and political roles.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

The private Member's resolution just entered by the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair, pursuant to Standing Order 63(3), that will be the resolution to be debated this Wednesday.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS Route 60 is a main highway that runs through the Town of Conception Bay South, it's a vital artery in the provincial road network; and

WHEREAS Route 60 is one of the most heavily travelled roads in the province; and

WHEREAS Route 60 has been deteriorating and requires major upgrades;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to allocate funds to upgrade Route 60.

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

Mr. Speaker, that petition is directly, of course, from my district. During a recent announcement of the five-year Roads Program Route 60 was excluded, or is not there on the list yet. I realize there is a time that it could be put there, but it's an issue that I've made clear for the last year since I was elected, that road is in need of major repairs. So I was a bit taken aback when I read this roads list and it was excluded.

To go to further, comments that I've made publicly on this issue is I've been calling upon the Minister of Transportation and Works to provide the full roads list for the entire province. We have X number of provincial roads, why not provide the comprehensive scoring list for every road in the province so people can see where and if and what these roads will ever have an opportunity to see the light of day getting work done. I'm sure they all will eventually but if you provided the listing and the scoring for those roads, at least we could say: it's fine to say you're taking the politics out of paving but your actions have to match your words.

So if you're saying you're providing this list, provide the full list. Not just a list of the roads you're tendering to get work done on, provide the entire list. You can always change your tendered road or a list. Once it's tendered, it's different. These roads are not tendered. They're on a list. They can be subject to change should something happen.

So it's fine to say you don't want to box yourself in, but I take personal exception to Route 60 in my own district. I'm sure other Members as well feel the same way on roads in their own district. They do not know where they stand on the list. And I'll call upon the minister again – I'm

pushing 10 months asking for it and I'll continue – provide us a list. At least we know where we stand, instead of we sit there on bended knees, go in cap in hand and, hopefully, he's going to put our road on the list next year if we don't ruffle too many feathers.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'll ruffle feathers or whatever. The people of the my district, that happens to be the second largest municipality in the province, are constantly on me about this and I'm going to keep speaking about it publicly because I feel that it's high time for the Minister of Transportation and Works to pay some more attention to those main arteries and if he's taking the politics out of paving, do what's required on Route 60.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS Marine Atlantic ferry rates continue to rise, becoming increasingly more cost prohibitive; and

WHEREAS increased rates impact the cost of goods being shipped into our province, as well as those products being exported out by local businesses; and

WHEREAS tourism is negatively impacted by the ever increasing, cost prohibitive means of ground transport into the Island portion of our province;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to open a line of communication with the federal government and begin to advocate on behalf of residents and businesses of the province, not stopping until results are realized.

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

Mr. Speaker, this is an issue that Members on both sides of the House have spoken about many times in the past and in recent history as well. We hear lots about the warm, fuzzy, happy relationship between our provincial government and our federal government, and it's great that everybody's happy and getting along and having Sunday night calls with the minister. That's great. It's wonderful, but results matter, Mr. Speaker. And on an issue like this, that I know is of concern to several Cabinet ministers on the front bench of the government who have been vocal in their previous roles prior to being in government, if the warm, fuzzy, cosy relationship exists, then hopefully we'll see some results and some progress.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. KENT: He's excited. It's birthday, Mr. Speaker. So I'm going to cut him some slack today.

This is a really serious issue. I know the government has finally acknowledged that they've written the federal government and they're going to talk about it and they're going to express some concern about the issue, but I would hope that this would be a really critical and important issue to the government and they would be calling on their cousins in Ottawa to put a stop to continuous Marine Atlantic rate increases.

What we're seeing now on April 1, the rates will go up another 2.6 per cent and Marine Atlantic are saying it's necessary to reflect the continuing increased costs associated with material, supplies and labour, and to help the company provide reliable service. Well, this is what we've heard for years from Marine Atlantic.

So I'm calling on all Members of the House of Assembly to be concerned about this. Petitioners are calling on the House of Assembly to be concerned about this; but, more importantly, we're calling on the Liberal government to reach out to their friends and colleagues in Ottawa and demand some action. It's great for everybody to be getting along, but if it doesn't result in anything happening, if it doesn't result in any

benefits for Newfoundland and Labrador, then that's a problem, Mr. Speaker. This should be a relatively easy one for our federal Liberal government and our provincial Liberal government to get together and solve.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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 government plans to remove the provincial point of sale tax rebate on books, which will raise the tax on books from 5 per cent to 15 per cent; and

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

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

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

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

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

Now, Mr. Speaker, it seems to fly in the face of reason, the imposition of a provincial tax on

books. It makes no sense at all. Considering we have the highest illiteracy rate; we have soaring unemployment; we have a problem, a huge problem, in the fiscal realities of our province. People are hurting. We have inflation. And we know that education is the keystone of empowering our people, and empowering our people so that we can weather the storm. That is the role of government. The role of government, particularly in hard times like this, is to empower communities, to strengthen communities, to strengthen individuals.

This kind of measure is the antithesis of that. We look, particularly, on the effects of students. I'm not so sure that government really thought through the ramifications of this particular decision. Let's see how it will hurt students.

At Memorial University, the *Heart of Darkness*, which would be a required book in an English course, is \$16 plus tax. *Microelectronic Circuits* is \$250 plus tax. *Supply Chain Logistics Management* is \$303.95 plus tax. We are taking money out of the pockets of some of the most vulnerable people in our communities, and that's students. Students who will carry high student debt, students who have to work in order to be able to continue their studies and we're taxing their textbooks.

We know that education, again, is one of the cornerstones to empowering our people so that they don't live in poverty, so that they can help the economy in and of itself be strengthened, that they can build the economy of our province. It is one of the most short sighted – aside from the levy that this government imposed when they came down with their last budget, this tax is so short sighted. When the government talks about flatter and leaner, I think it's flatter and meaner. It's one of the most idiotic taxes that we've seen in a long time.

Michael Crummey, as a matter of fact, said that the government will make more on the tax of books that he has written than he will himself as a writer. That makes no sense at all, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS the provincial government arbitrarily cut 24-hour snow clearing services in the 2016 budget; and

WHEREAS cutting 24-hour snow clearing services has led to unsafe road conditions and endangering lives; and

WHEREAS government has an obligation to provide a safe system of transportation that meets the needs of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians;

The undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call the House of Assembly to urge government to listen to the people and reinstate 24-hour snow clearing services.

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

Mr. Speaker, over the last number of months, my colleague from Conception Bay South has very eloquently got up and echoed the concerns of the people of this province, particularly in those areas where 24-hour snow clearing not only was part of the ongoing road system around winter maintenance and safety, but was necessary because of the volume of traffic that was out there.

And it was noted by thousands of people in emails the outrage, that safety has to be the primary objective. And while I realized the minister – and I was fortunate enough to serve for two winters as minister of Transportation and Works – must be cognizant of their budget lines, but you can't put safety ahead of having to make major cuts. You know, two budgets I had to make cuts around the Department of Transportation and Works 24-hour snow clearing on the main arteries where volumes of traffic dictate that it's travelling 24 hours, all times of the day, in all kinds of weather, was not prudent and in the best interest of the people of this province particularly doing it.

Would we have liked to have had 24-hour snow clearing everywhere? Of course we would have. But in high-volume areas when people have to be travelling in certain areas and you know there's going to be a volume of traffic, we have a responsibility to ensure and minimize the impact of the negativity of snow may have on people and ensure safety is there.

So the outrage has been there for a number of reasons. Outside of that, what I'm hearing from depots and some of the people I've talked to, the costing, with the call-outs in overtime is going to mitigate any savings that have been realized or anticipated by the department. And that's something we have to look at here. It has to be around the safety-related process. And I do agree – sometimes you have to make decisions around financial responsibilities and financial obligations.

But, at this point, this is being shown not to be in any way, shape or form a financial exercise that saves the people of this province any money. What it does is endanger people's lives, ensure that businesses themselves have to change their whole scheduling around when they travel. I've heard from cab companies about the dangers in some of these areas. I've heard from courier companies. I've heard from manufacturing companies. I've heard from trucking companies who've said they're endangering the lives of those employees when they have to travel – the general public themselves.

And I do realize the minister will try to mitigate any dangers by looking at being able to call people out at a moment's notice, but unfortunately you can't dictate what the weather's going to be, and unfortunately that has an impact. So I urge the government to go back, reassess this and make a decision to reinstate 24-hour snow clearing.

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 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 Newfoundland and Labrador has the greatest percentage of the workforce earning the provincial minimum wage in Canada, with women, youth and those from rural areas making up a disproportionate number of these workers; and

WHEREAS the minimum wage does not provide enough money for the necessities of life because a person earning a minimum wage, working 40 hours a week, will make between \$21,320 and \$21,840, which is barely above the low income cut-off of \$20,065 for St. John's, and a working couple on minimum wage, with two children, will also make close to low income; and

WHEREAS in 2012 the minimum wage review committee recommended an increase in the minimum wage in 2013 to reflect the loss of purchasing power since 2010 and an annual adjustment beginning in 2014 to reflect the Consumer Price Index; and

WHEREAS government instead legislated two 25-cent increases, one in October 2014 and one in October 2015 with no annual adjustment; and

WHEREAS eight provinces and territories will have a higher minimum wage than Newfoundland and Labrador, or did have by October 2015;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to legislate an immediate increase in the minimum wage to restore the loss of purchasing power since 2010 and an annual adjustment to the minimum wage beginning in 2016 to reflect the Consumer Price Index.

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition was signed prior to government finally taking some action with regard to minimum wage and setting up the consultations that are now going on with regard

to the indexation of the minimum wage. The thing is the indexation is going to be extremely important, but workers in Newfoundland and Labrador have lost so much between 2010 and 2015 when the Consumer Price Index rose twice as much than the increase in wages for people and the cost of food rose 15 per cent, three times as much as the wage increases for people on minimum wage.

So it's going to be extremely important that if the government is going to start a Consumer Price Index, they are going to have to correct the wage first before starting the Consumer Price Index. They're going to have to make up for the loss of wages that went on from 2010 to 2015, then look at doing the top-up to match the CPI.

I'm not sure what's in government's mind, but I know that people going to the consultations are pointing this out to them. That we absolutely need the CPI, but we need the wage to go up first. You know, we stagnated while others were growing. We have to do more than catch up now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

MR. SPEAKER: Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I've previously, during Notices of Motion, gave notice on a number of pieces of legislation and with the leave of my colleagues opposite, I would ask leave to do first readings on three pieces of legislation today.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Does the hon. the Government House Leader have leave?

AN HON. MEMBER: Leave.

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

I don't know if they were telling me to leave or if they are giving me leave, but thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by Minister of Education, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Financial Administration Act No. 2, Bill 65, and I further move that the said bill be now read the first time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded by the hon. the Government House Leader that he shall have leave to introduce Bill 65 and that the said bill be now read a first 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.'

Carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board to introduce a bill, "An Act To Amend The Financial Administration Act No. 2," carried. (Bill 65)

CLERK (Barnes): A bill, An Act To Amend The Financial Administration Act No. 2. (Bill 65)

MR. SPEAKER: Bill 65 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 65 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 Financial Administration Act No. 3, Bill 66, and I further move that the said bill be now read the first time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded by the hon. the Government House Leader that he shall have leave to introduce Bill 66 and that the said bill be now read a first 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.'

Carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board to introduce a bill, "An Act To Amend The Financial Administration Act No. 3," carried. (Bill 66)

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Financial Administration Act No. 3. (Bill 66)

MR. SPEAKER: Bill 66 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 66 read 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 Service NL, for leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Public Safety Act, Bill 67, and I further move that the said bill be now read the first time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded by the hon. the Government House Leader that he shall have leave to introduce Bill 67 and that the said bill be now read a first 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.'

Carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Service NL to introduce a bill, "An Act To Amend The Public Safety Act," carried. (Bill 67)

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Public Safety Act. (Bill 67)

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 67 read a first time, ordered read a second time on tomorrow.

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

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

Again, I thank my colleagues for leave to do first reading and I would now call from the Order Paper: Address in Reply.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Lewisporte – Twillingate.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. D. BENNETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to deliver my maiden speech and to speak about the district I represent and the pride I feel in being elected to this hon. House. Actually, I think this is my fourth version of my maiden speech, so there have been a few changes along the way.

It's truly a great privilege to be out representing the beautiful and scenic District of Lewisporte – Twillingate. I would like to begin by extending my sincere appreciation to the people who have worked so hard to get me here. While it's dangerous to single out people, I have to recognize my co-campaign managers, Betty Clarke and Brent Spracklin, who worked so diligently throughout this journey.

We had a very inexperienced team when we started. Most of us have never been involved in a political campaign before. But what we lacked in experience, we made up for in commitment. Our team was built on the belief that what we were engaged in was important to our region's future. It was that team approach and the great people working with us that brought success.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge Mr. Ronald Dawe and the Liberal party for all their guidance and direction during the campaign process. Their contribution and commitment did not go unnoticed. To my friends and supporters throughout the district, thank you. You have trusted me to represent you as your Member of this Assembly. You can rest assured that I will do all that I can to meet your expectations.

During my campaign I made one promise: that I would represent the people of my district, of Lewisporte – Twillingate, to the best of my ability. And I intend to keep that promise.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. D. BENNETT: There are so many people to thank, it is almost overwhelming. To my daughter Catherine, my son Jonathan, and his wife Robyn, thank you for all your love and support. To my mother-in-law and father-in-law, Art and Jane Pickett, you've always been there for our family, and there are no words to express my appreciation. Mr. Speaker, there's an old saying: Behind every successful man, there's a really good woman. In my case, there's a great woman, and that's truly, truly very supportive, my wife, Tina.

She has been my greatest supporter; the source of my strength, the one that picks me up when I'm down. Tina has always been there for me. While I spent countless hours away from home, running recreation programs and special events

in my previous career, Tina was at the home front. During the election, this commitment did not change. While I was out on the campaign trail, knocking on doors daylight and dark, she continued to work herself and manage the home; helping me to prepare my next day; doing data entry; and making sure I had a home-cooked meal every night. Tina, without your support, this would not be possible. Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. D. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, I grew up in Lewisporte and would like to share a little about its history. Settlers first moved to Lewisporte in 1887 to take advantage of the prosperous fishing, logging and shipbuilding industries. A railway station was built in 1900 at Notre Dame Junction, just 11 kilometres south of Lewisporte. With the railway station established, Timber Estates Limited, a sawmill operation, made Lewisporte a shipping location, producing more than all other Newfoundland sawmills combined. The mill was a major reason for the growth of our town.

During the war years, Lewisporte played an important operation for the Canadian Forces. Three army sites were constructed to protect the fuel supply to Gander. Lewisporte's population increased as the town's transportation and distribution functions became more important.

Lewisporte Wholesalers and Steers Limited began a wholesaling business in the community and were suppliers to the rest of the province. Other companies followed suit. Lewisporte became a major distribution centre. In 1946, the town became incorporated and, by 1976, the population had grown to 3,200 people.

In the 1950s and '60s, the community made rapid advancements: water and sewer systems, and a high school, Canadian National shed and wharf, paved streets and a local newspaper were also added to the town. Modern banking, financial, legal, medical services had been established, along with restaurants and hotel, and a vibrant retail trade. Playgrounds and ballparks, along with the ice stadium, provided recreational activities. Today, Lewisporte continues to serve as a hub for the region and is a great place to work, to visit and to raise your family.

Mr. Speaker, I attribute the person I am today to my parents Ross and Daisy Bennett. They taught me life-long values of trust, honesty and consideration for others. My father worked 42 years with the Canadian National. He retired at the age of 65 and passed away in 2003 at the age of 76.

My mother spent her life as a homemaker. Together, Mom and Dad had 14 children, seven boys and seven girls, then I came along to break the tie. Yes, I'm the baby of 15 children and my siblings quickly remind me of that every chance they get.

AN HON. MEMBER: How old are they?

MR. D. BENNETT: Oh, they're a lot older than me.

I have to thank my siblings and their extended families for all their support over the years and during the election. Growing up, we didn't have a lot of material things or riches, but we were rich in many other ways; we had a loving and caring family.

Our neighborhood wasn't the way it is now either. When I grew up, there were dozens of children around and our lives were consumed with playing sports and doing things outside. There were no cellphones, no laptops, and social media was actually sitting down talking to one another face to face.

When I told my mother I was planning to run for the House of Assembly, she was so supportive and declared to anyone who would listen that I was going to win. Sadly, just before the nomination, she passed away at the age of 92. I know she's with my dad now looking down and, no doubt, proud of her big family and their accomplishments, and in some way, still protecting her children.

Mr. Speaker, prior to being elected – or Madam Speaker, sorry – prior to being elected, I worked with the Town of Lewisporte as the Director of Recreation and Tourism. Ironically, the date of my Liberal nomination was the 25th anniversary of me working with the town. Jokingly, I told my friends that it was a sign; my life sentence was served and now it's time for a new challenge. In reality, I loved my job, worked

with great people and enjoyed serving the community that I still call home.

Through my time with the Town of Lewisporte, I worked with a community that enjoyed growth. My job was to develop recreation programs, facilities and community special events such as the Mussel Bed Soiree. The Soiree has grown to be one of the largest festivals in the province.

We launched the Lewisporte Craft and Trade Show which is now celebrating its 20th year and is the highest attended show off the Avalon.

I was honoured to work with the development of the Lewisporte Marina Complex. And I'm proud to say, because of the work of some visionary volunteers, it is the largest marina facility for recreational boating in Atlantic Canada. This world-class marina is home to local, provincial and national mariners. The facility is getting international exposure and is quickly becoming a popular destination for adventurous sailors from many foreign lands. With vessels porting there from the United States, Switzerland, Austria and France, just to name a few, Notre Dame Bay is a sailors paradise. It has been called the Caribbean of the North, thanks to the numerous islands, anchorages and magnificent scenery.

Madam Speaker, my greatest satisfaction has always come from working with volunteer committees and non-profit organizations. I have served on a number of capacities over the years, everything from being President of Recreation Newfoundland and Labrador to being the chairperson of the Central IcePak Major Midget Hockey Team and an honorary member of the Kinsmen Club of Notre Dame. My past work and volunteer experience, combined with my strong working relationship with the people of my district, along with my desire to see the region group to its full potential is the reason why I chose to seek election. I'm a strong believer, if you want to see change; you have to contribute to making change.

My District of Lewisporte – Twillingate is made up of over 40 municipalities and local service districts. Each one is special to me. The entire district is rich in history and culture and these two things have made it a popular tourism destination. Whether you are a visitor or a

resident looking to experience the beauty of icebergs, whales, scenic trails, or try your luck at catching a codfish – in season, of course – there's always something to do. Lewisporte – Twillingate District offers an experience that is breathtaking and memorable.

Mr. Speaker, the district boasts a number of festivals, which I had the opportunity of attending this past summer. I'm going to take a moment to talk about some of these great community events that are so important to building community pride.

The Lewisporte Mussel Bed Soiree, which I referenced a few minutes ago, celebrated its 30th anniversary and was host to five days of activities for people of all ages. I have been involved in organizing the festival for the past 25 years, so it was a different feeling being there as a spectator this year versus being in charge of the event.

The Fish, Fun and Folk Festival, which is into its 35th year, is one of the longest-running provincial festivals and is rated in the top 10 in Canada. This year was a great success for the Fish, Fun and Folk Festival again.

The Herring Neck Dory Race celebrated its third year this summer, and has become a very popular event for tourists and locals alike. Although my dory racing skills were pretty rusty, I had a great partner in 17-year-old Cameron Rice. Cameron is one of the organizers and a true role model for youth.

Madam Speaker, this past September, the Digital Arts Festival, entitled Unscripted Twillingate, built on its successes from previous years. It provided local businesses with the opportunity to extend the tourism season and showcase the best of Twillingate through four days of workshops, entertainment and adventure centred around the digital arts industry.

The neighbouring community of Crow Head hosted come home year celebrations last summer. The event brought home hundreds of past residents for a weekend of fun, reminiscing about the past, reacquainting with old friends and making new ones.

In addition to the festivals and sightseeing, there's so much more to experience in the region. Madam Speaker, Twillingate really comes alive during the summer months, and there's no wondering why it is rated one of the province's top tourism destinations. My colleague behind me from the District of Bonavista, we always have the ongoing debate over which area has the greatest visitation and which is the best tourism destination.

The most important thing is that all tourists continue to visit and we continue to develop our potential. The positive impact tourism has on my district and our province is immense. This year, many in the tourism industry saw increased numbers in revenues from 20 to 50 per cent over previous years. From the Prime Berth fishing village, which won three major awards this year, to Auk Island Winery, which is producing some of the greatest wines in the province, we are capitalizing on our tourism market.

Also in my district, on Route 340, the Beothuk Interpretation Centre in Boyd's Cove, the site of a Beothuk village that was inhabited over 300 years ago. Walk the trail or tour their centre with exhibits and artifacts that foster appreciation for this unique and now vanished culture.

When it comes to tourism, we are in the top of our game. In addition to our great tourism industry, there are other thriving businesses as well. The Cottle's Island lumberyard employs over 100 people. It's a growing industry, diversifying their business model by producing wood products that is being shipped across the country.

The fishery is also a big industry for us with processing plants in Comfort Cove, Newstead and Twillingate. The district is home to a large group of fish harvesters, all of whom make a living off the rich resources from our sea.

Although there's a great deal of positive activity happening in the district, we are not without our challenges. In March 2015, Breakwater Fisheries processing plant in Cottlesville was destroyed by fire and will not be rebuilt. This was devastating to the Town of Cottlesville. Over 100 people now face the challenge of finding new employment.

Further impacting the fishery in Notre Dame Bay is the reduction to the shrimp and crab quotas, along with the early closure of the mackerel fishery. All of this has had an impact on the fish plants in Comfort Cove, Newstead and Twillingate. However, on the good news side, we have established a great working relationship with our federal government. LIFO and other regulations have been changed so that more product can be caught and produced by inshore fisherpersons.

The announcement of the re-establishment of the coast guard service in Twillingate will again provide a much needed, enhanced service for safety of our fisherpersons, our tour operators and our mariners. We have to continue to build on this relationship with Ottawa for the economic benefits of our province.

Madam Speaker, maintaining quality health care is also a major concern for me and my constituents. The sod turning ceremony for a new private clinic in Lewisporte back in October was welcomed. It will result in more local physicians in a modern facility. However, maintaining service in New World Island clinic and in Notre Dame Bay Memorial Health Centre in Twillingate is also a concern. I'm committed to working with the residents, Central Health and the Minister of Health and Community services to enhance medical care wherever we can.

Madam Speaker, back in October, my district was one of the hardest hit areas by Hurricane Matthew. This one singular event destroyed what many residents worked a lifetime to build. The devastation would have been much greater if it weren't for the efforts of volunteers, first responders and municipal employees and leaders who worked co-operatively to minimize the damage.

I have to commend the Premier and the Minister of Municipal Affairs, and also the Minister of Transportation and Works and their staff, local contractors, and Fire and Emergency Services for their quick response and their tireless efforts. Their efforts eased the stress of affected residents and their communities.

In closing, Madam Speaker, although the past 15 months have been challenging, they have also

been very rewarding. I have made a lot of new friendships throughout the district and am blessed to work with some of the greatest people you will ever meet. I would also like to thank again my family and friends for supporting me, and a big thank you to all the people of my great district for trusting me to represent them.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER (Dempster): The Speaker recognizes the hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. KENT: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and welcome back.

I want to begin by congratulating the Member for Lewisporte – Twillingate on his maiden speech this afternoon. I hadn't realized that we still hadn't gotten through all the maiden speeches, given that we're a year and a half into a new term. But the challenge is when there are a lot of new MHAs and there's a change in government, of course there are going to be a lot of maiden speeches to give.

Fitting them in, in the course of debate in the House of Assembly, sometimes takes some time. So I know the Member's been on his feet in the House before today, but congratulations on delivering your maiden speech this afternoon. He was a gentleman about it and had good words to say about his district and people that have supported him, so congratulations on that.

And welcome to everybody, back to the House of Assembly. Earlier than normal; earlier than when we've traditionally come back in the spring. And while the snow outside has been reduced; it's certainly not spring yet. Spring, I think, is still a ways away. But I am pleased that we have some more structure to the House schedule, and I think that will result in a smoother process here. And I, for one, support that change and am delighted to be back in the House of Assembly.

Several people said to me on the weekend: Oh, so you're back to work on Monday. I know it's something we smile and can joke about, but it also can be a little frustrating because the work

of an MHA certainly spans well beyond the work that we do in this Chamber. In fact, I'll often say to people casually that it's hard to get work done when you spend the morning getting ready for the House of Assembly, you're in for several hours, then you might get a few phone calls returned, and it's particularly challenging for those that live outside of the capital region.

For me, I still get to go home to my district at some point this evening and met with constituents and do whatever else I have to do. But that's more challenging for those who come from rural districts. So the work of an MHA is certainly not only when the House of Assembly is open. In fact, a lot of the work, the bulk of the work we do, is outside of this Chamber, even though the work that we do here together is really important.

During this Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne it gives an opportunity to talk about whatever we want to talk about. It gives us an opportunity to address issues in our district, gives us an opportunity to talk about current matters affecting the province and things that our constituents might be concerned about.

So in the brief time I have today, I'm going to take an opportunity to do some of that. And, of course, now that we're back into the spring session, there were some bills introduced today that we'll start debate on tomorrow. But because of the parliamentary process, there aren't bills for us to debate today, which is why we're able to rise and speak to the reply to the Speech from the Throne, which is another parliamentary tradition.

So, on a less positive note, I'd like to talk about some of the recent media reports and controversy related to some changes that were announced last week. I'd like to get an opportunity to talk about what's going on in my district in Mount Pearl and St. John's, but I'd like to begin by talking about an issue that relates to one of the portfolios that I'm the Official Opposition critic for, and that's Culture. Despite the department name change last week, I was going to continue to be the Culture critic regardless, along with my other duties.

I will commend government and commend the minister for today's move, today's reversal of

last week's decision and now the word "culture" is back in the department name, which I believe is the Department of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation.

So I think words matter. It's not all that matters, but this was an issue that was really important to our cultural sector and government – we all heard loud and clear that people were upset about the move last week. I commend the minister for going before the microphones today and saying: Yeah, we made a mistake. We heard loud and clear and we're making the change before a lot of money was spent. The minister pointed out in his remarks this morning that there weren't new letterhead printing and new business cards ordered. So it was good that the reversal of the decision happened quickly. I think that's a positive thing.

However, the however is that there are still cuts happening within the department that our arts community, our cultural community, our heritage community, is very concerned about. So while it seemed on the surface that it was simply about the department name and, for some, it was about the symbolism of the department name in terms of what that suggests about government priorities, it's actually a much bigger issue than that. Because there are many people in our province and outside our province who are affiliated with our cultural and arts and heritage communities who are very concerned about some cuts to some key positions that are happening.

So while the name has been fixed, the current Liberal government is still proceeding to eliminate the director of arts and to eliminate the director of heritage and other positions as well within the newly defined Department of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation.

So it's great that the department's name change – that culture had been restored as part of that, but there are still some key positions within the department that have been cut and we've yet to get answers on what impact that will have on operations. So I suspect the minister will say: Well, it's not going to have any impact. We're going to realign duties and it's all going to be fine. But the bottom line is that some fairly senior key positions that support our arts and heritage sectors have been eliminated. So the

question becomes: Who's going to provide the administrative leadership and the support to those sectors with those positions now gone?

So we're talking about hundreds of thousands of dollars of cuts last week to our arts and cultural and heritage sectors that are supported by the provincial government. So that is still a concern, and I hope that we'll hear more from the minister in terms of addressing that concern.

From what I hear from the interview that was done with the minister this morning, that issue was not really addressed. So I hope that at some point in media interviews or at some point during the course of debate in the House of Assembly that the minister will speak to that and speak to those ongoing concerns from the arts and cultural and heritage communities about these cuts.

So it's good that government admitted its mistake and is acknowledging the concern from the sector, but let's make no mistake, government is still proceeding with cuts to the heritage, culture and arts divisions of the former Department of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development that's now the Department of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation. So while words matter, the decisions to cut some key positions, some key leadership roles that affect those sectors, that matters a lot as well.

I'd like the minister to tell us how many positions were cut, specifically what positions were cut. And, further to that, what is the practical impact? What does he suspect the impact will be on those sectors, and who's going to do that work and who's going to provide that support going forward?

You know, on the same day that government decided to change the name, shuffle some chairs around and try and take some of the political heat off themselves by doing some minor restructuring in some cases and major restructuring in other cases, the same day that the word culture came out of the department's name, the director of arts for the province, that position was eliminated. The director of heritage position for the province was eliminated. So that seems significant to me.

Beyond the name change, arts advocates are saying loudly and clearly that they feel the reductions in those key positions that I've mentioned is a cost-cutting initiative that will make effective governance impossible. So I'd like to hear the minister's thoughts about that. I'd like to understand from him why he feels that's okay, and why he feels those cuts to those sectors are justified. And I'd like him to speak to the specific concerns that he's heard from people in industry.

I know for a fact that he has received dozens of individual pieces of correspondence from artists and those involved in the arts sectors in our province. They have raised these questions and concerns, and I feel they deserve answers. I suspect the minister will write them all back, but I hope he'll provide some clear answers on how this work is going to get done, and how can you say that these sectors are so important when you're still proceeding with cuts despite fixing the name in the department.

The minister referenced this morning the status of the artists legislation that's going to be coming forward. On the surface I would say that sounds like a good initiative and I look forward to learning more and seeing more on that, but I wonder what the expected results will be. What will be the impact for artists? What will be the impact on the overall arts sector? And will there be measurable results, and how will those results be measured? How will those results be reported on?

The minister said in a recent interview as well that government is as committed to culture as ever. Well, I'm hearing from people today who are finding that a little hard to believe, Madam Speaker. Because how can you say that when in the last week there have been significant cuts within the new department, once again newly-named Department of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation. And people are also concerned about what's not being said at this point. They're concerned about what other cuts may be coming as government goes through its budget process.

Another question I'd have for the minister relates to exactly that. Can we anticipate even further cuts to areas like arts and heritage, and culture, as the spring budget approaches? Based

on what we've seen over the past week, I think the arts community does have reason to be concerned. Let me just give you a flavour of some of the concerns we've heard. And again, some of what I'm going to share with you relates specifically to the name change, but as you'll hear, it's bigger than that.

It's not just about the name of the department. It's about the fact that some key support to these sectors that contribute greatly to economic development in our province, some key support to those sectors has been eliminated. Here's one note from an arts leader in our community who wrote over the weekend to express some concerns. And again, it's not just about the name of the department, which is why I want to share these concerns with Members of the House of Assembly today.

Minister, thank you for saying that your door is open for discussion, because words matter. Last night I saw *The Once* play the 800-seat theatre at the National Arts Centre. The sold out performance ended with a three-encore standing ovation. I would wager that the band said the word Newfoundland – I wish they had also said Labrador – upwards of 20 times, maybe more.

A production I am personally involved in, a stage-adaptation of *Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, opened last night at the 400-seat Neptune Theatre in Halifax to a full house and standing ovations as well. The word Newfoundland is said 64 times in that production. Ten days ago, that show finished its run here in Ottawa, playing to close to 11,000 people.

This afternoon, at the National War Museum, I saw the beautiful *The Door You Came In* by Newfoundlander once-removed David MacFarlane. Again, a sold out house, ending with tears and a standing ovation, top to tail full of stories of our place. I would say he says the word Newfoundland 30 times in the performance. I'm not able to begin to guess the number of people who have been turning the pages of our writers, listening to our musicians, and gazing into the works of our filmmakers and visual artists over the past two days, but I promise you it is in the thousands. This is a snapshot of just two days. That's a lot of

Newfoundland and Labrador in a lot of places at one time.

The artists of our province provide untold value that can't be reduced down to visits to gift shops. I've had two different people tell me that they moved to the province after watching Robert Chafe's *Tempting Providence*. What would happen if we remove the Newfoundland and Labrador from all of these shows that are such a calling card for the province and such a celebration of our place for the people who live there? Removing the word culture from the Newfoundland and Labrador government priorities makes me wonder why we try so hard.

So I think those eloquent sentiments sum up a lot of the concerns that we're hearing from people in our arts and cultural communities. We're hearing from actors and artists and writers and poets and musicians and people in all kinds of facets of the arts and cultural communities who are writing with very similar messages. Even though the reversal of the decision on the name of the department was announced this morning, these concerns continue to roll in today. And they continue to roll in because the problem isn't solved by simply changing the name of the department. It's great that that's happened. It's great that that's been fixed, but the cuts that happened last week cannot be ignored and cannot be forgotten about.

Let me just share some more sentiments with you from some artists in our province. The cultural industries are a significant driver of the economy of our province and the health and well-being of its people. It is already an extremely broad term that spans arts, heritage, food, clothing, language, history and more. It has both for-profit and not-for-profit businesses. It covers buildings, it covers individuals. Its workers are in the thousands with skills that are wide ranging and needs that are differing. To bury such a huge and diverse industry under the banner of others is a mistake.

To drop culture from the name is to drop it in priority. In real terms, you're dropping the priority of a recognized growth industry worth \$455 million annually; one that is a renewable resource, one that is a success story, one that brings in tourism while ameliorating the lives of those who live here. To drop from view such an

industry shows an extreme lack of understanding that is undermining our faith in your stewardship. To reduce key staff is a cost-cutting initiative that will make effective governance impossible – to reduce key staff is a cost-cutting initiative that will make effective governance impossible. And these are not my words; these are the words of artists and those involved in the arts and cultural industries who are quite concerned about the decisions of this Liberal government in recent days.

The arts and cultural industries are filled with nationally recognized individuals, as well as institutions with decades of experience being providers and drivers in our communities. The Arts and Culture Centres are celebrating 50 years this year. Rising Tide has been a cultural leader in this province for 40 years. The Resource Centre for the Arts and the LSPU Hall has been launching artists for 40 years. The Stephenville Theatre Festival has been the backbone of culture and tourism in the Bay St. George area for 39 years.

Artistic Fraud of Newfoundland has over 20 years under its belt. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have toured around the world; have been seen on stages from Stratford to Broadway to New Zealand. We run major institutions like the National Arts Centre and the Toronto Dance Theatre. Our musicians are heard around the planet. Our writers ignite the imaginations of millions; the work of our visual artists, hanging collections worldwide.

Our stories have been seen in such prestigious places as the Toronto International Film Festival, Cannes, the Sundance Film Festival, Netflix, Discovery Canada and, of course, the CBC. We've been nominated for Oscars and we've been syndicated around the planet. We know our industry. We're deeply concerned about this direction that the government is taking. We hope that you will find a path forward that will enable the continued growth of this sector that you, the government, have rightly identified as vital and important.

So there are several actions that people are calling on government to take. One was reinstating the word "culture" in the title of the department. So you can tick that box. That's the easy one and that's been done. But they're also

calling on government to reinstate the key positions like the director of arts and the director of heritage that were cut last week.

Now, I'm not going to stand here and say that government shouldn't make changes to the management structure of government departments. Some of those moves are necessary. I get that there's an evolution that needs to happen within government departments. But the overall approach to cuts that this government is taking is haphazard and is irresponsible and there is a better way.

For instance, we had a very aggressive attrition plan that could have been accelerated that would have addressed some of the concerns about the size of the public sector that we all have, or most of us have. So instead of following through with that plan, the approach has been sporadic and haphazard and knee-jerk, and now we're seeing real impact on some key sectors in our province.

Artists are also calling for assurances from government that funding for arts and culture and heritage will be maintained and even expanded. I think it's a huge economic development opportunity for our province. We can't just think of it as supporting the arts, period. It's about investing in real economic growth that's measurable. I mean, we're talking about hundreds of millions of dollars of economic activity each and every year in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Madam Speaker, I see my time is up. I hope that I'll get more opportunities this session to rise and talk about other issues and talk about issues related specifically to my district as well, but this was an important one that I couldn't let pass today.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: The Speaker recognizes the hon. Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources.

MR. CROCKER: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I'm just getting used to that name of the department myself, but it's a pleasure to stand

here today and, first of all, represent the people of the District of Carbonear – Trinity – Bay de Verde. It's always a privilege to stand in this place and represent the people that elect you.

Madam Speaker, I guess the Member who just spoke raised some points about negativity and where we're headed as a province. Well, you know, from the challenges that we faced over the last 12 or 15 months as a province, I feel, as a government, we've made some progress with some of the changes that, unfortunately, we had to make and some of the things that we faced when we came into government. But I'm just going to take a few minutes now, first off, I think to talk about the department which I represent today and I'll lead into the district that I represent because the two are tied very much I think.

I guess when you think about challenges, only this afternoon we're seeing news coming out of DFO meetings here in St. John's with respect to the crab stocks off our coast and, just about a week and a half ago, we heard concerns raised around the shrimp stocks off our coast. So as a province, we're headed to a period of transition in the fishery. It's very important that right now, we, as government and, we, as a province and, we, as a House of Assembly work very hard to ensure that the transition from shellfish back to groundfish is as seamless as possible.

Just take a minute actually to look back to 2015-16, the year that we're just coming out of in the fishery in this province and if you look at the province's production market value this year, it's going to be the highest ever. So we see great things coming out of the fishery because let's never forget that the real backbone of this province has been and always will be the fishery and it's an integral part of how we grow this province.

I know, Madam Speaker, Members opposite share that view as well. Just this afternoon, I had a conversation with my critic on the fisheries file and we shared the concerns of where we're headed this year, unfortunately, it looks like, in the shellfish industry. But I can assure the harvesters and processors in this province that we'll do our utmost as a government to ensure that the transition from what was a predominant shellfish industry to a groundfish industry is as

seamless as possible. But it's important that we recognize the challenges that the fishery in this province will face in the coming years.

Just to reflect on that, when I think about the fishery and the impact it has on the entire province, I quickly reflect to my own district because my district, Madam Speaker, I would argue is one of the most, if not, the most, dependent district in this province on the fishery; and it's very important that we make sure that we're there and we do what we can to help facilitate that transition.

You know, if you look all around the province, Madam Speaker, I think of your particular district where you look at the work that the Labrador Union Shrimp Company does and the challenges that we face in that region of the province this year with the declining shrimp and decline in crab. So we're going to have a lot of challenges in the fishery this year, but I can assure you, as a government, we'll work with the harvesters and processors to the best of our ability.

One of the other things, I guess, in my portfolio today, Madam Speaker, is aquaculture, and we see some tremendous opportunities and tremendous developments in aquaculture in this province. Just this past December, we had Northern Harvest announce an expansion to their facility in Stephenville, which is going to bring another 6,000 tons of salmon into production in the province.

You know, we have things happening in the province with regard to the proposal from Grieg, Madam Speaker. Just this Friday, it was announced that Marine Harvest, which is the largest aquaculture company in the world, producing – or actually last year their sales were somewhere in the \$2.5 billion range. And this company successfully acquired the assets of Gray Aquaculture on the South Coast of the province. This company, too, would also bring a lot of opportunity to the province, along with existing companies like Cooke and Northern Harvest.

And then, Madam Speaker, in *The Way Forward* document the Premier outlined that one of the things that we will do as we move to develop our economies primarily in rural Newfoundland

and Labrador with regard to aquaculture is we're looking also to grow the mussel industry. That industry is primarily located on the Northeast coast of the province, and it's also an opportunity for a great expansion in that.

And just to add to the aquaculture side, Madam Speaker, we will this year see our largest ever volume and GDP benefit from aquaculture in this province. So I guess that's two parts of the portfolio that I currently sit in, Madam Speaker.

I guess it'll be two weeks this Thursday I was on the West Coast with the Premier and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and local MHAs from the region, and we were able to announce 64,000 hectares of agricultural land that we're going to add to our agricultural land base in this province. It's important when you realize that only 10 per cent of our produce in the province today, Madam Speaker, is grown here. We need to do better. And I think everybody in this House would agree that as a province we need to grow more of our own food.

Of the 62 areas of interest that we've outlined and we're working with stakeholders to develop in the province, we're not just looking at certain regions of the province; we're looking at the entire province. Six of the 62 are located in Labrador, and 56 are located here on the Island. These have brought in a lot of co-operation through different agencies.

We've had 25 municipalities that we've had to consult with, with regard to the changes to the Crown Lands and bringing more land into agriculture. And I can tell you the municipalities that we've consulted with, both through us and through Municipal Affairs, have been more than willing to come on board and want to be a part of us growing more in this province. So that's something, Madam Speaker, we will work towards in the coming months to get this land into the hands of farmers in our province.

Madam Speaker, this coming summer we as a province will host Canada's Agriculture Ministers here in St. John's where we hope to conclude a new framework agreement that will take the place of Growing Forward 2. We're very much looking forward to the opportunity this summer to conclude the negotiations on that agreement and bring some much needed funding

back into the province when it comes to agriculture.

Just to conclude on agriculture, I had the opportunity last week to speak at the Greenhouse Conference here in St. John's. It's very interesting when you look at the things that we're doing here in the city and in all parts of the province when it comes to greenhouse agriculture.

One other thing, last week in our announcement of the changes to some of the structures of government, Madam Speaker, as a government now we're looking at the Wooddale Tree Nursery to expand its mandate not only from a seedling operation, which is very important to our forestry industry, but we're also looking at other things that we can use this facility, located in Wooddale in Central Newfoundland and Labrador, to produce more and to give us some more opportunities in the agriculture industry.

If we look for a moment, Madam Speaker, at one of the other industries that would play very much a large role in our future as a province, is the forestry. We've made some achievements in the forestry industry over the last number of weeks. We see some activity in Central Newfoundland, we see our existing companies looking to expand. There's great opportunity for the forest industry in this province. It's an industry that has evolved over the years. We've gone from three paper mills to one, and that itself brings challenges. Again, it is something that as a province we must and will address when it comes to the availability of all the resources that we have.

Back in December, I guess, Madam Speaker, the Department of Municipal Affairs, Minister Joyce, we brought in some changes to the Crown *Lands Act* that are very much in line with what municipalities have been asking this province for a long time. And we look forward to making even more changes to the *Lands Act* in the coming months. It's important that we get Crown lands into the hands of municipalities and people who want to use this land.

Madam Speaker, just for a moment I guess, if you look at where we see the vision of this province. You look at a department like the department that I'm currently sitting in, there's a

lot of opportunity in our renewable resources in this province. If you look around, whether it's in fisheries, agriculture, forestry, agrifoods, all of those bring together resources that are abundant here in Newfoundland and Labrador and resources that you know as we move forward as a province we will need to develop to their fullest.

When you think about some of the groups out there today and some of the things that we've been able to achieve, it's very important that one of the things we need to do is to work as a group of stakeholders or shareholders I guess to make sure that everything we do in this province is done with the utmost of respect for our environment, respect for our native and indigenous people. So we will continue in this department to consult.

Again, when you look at the different areas of the province, and I'll come back to my own district, you know, we see many challenges but we also see many opportunities, whether it's in the fishery, forestry, agrifoods. But, at the end of the day, Madam Speaker, it's important we all work together.

I'm going to conclude right now, but again, thank you for the opportunity this afternoon.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MADAM SPEAKER: The Speaker recognizes the hon. Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It certainly is great to be back in the House of Assembly again. I want to welcome everybody back. I'm sure we all enjoyed having the opportunity of getting out and about in our districts; talking to the people, hearing what they have to say and hopefully we're going to bring their views forward in the House of Assembly as we proceed.

Madam Speaker, there are many things I could speak about. I guess we're into Address in Reply, so it's wide open basically to speak about whatever you wish, whether it be about your district or whether it be about issues occurring in the province and so on and there certainly are a number of things.

I'm not going to dwell on the budget today. There's going to be lots of opportunity as time goes on to talk about that. I will say, though, that I guess as was predicted at the time and as was said at the time, we've seen a number of people that I'm sure we've all heard from, I know we've all heard from some of them, who continue to have challenges, very significant challenges as it relates to, I guess, the impacts of the budget on their households. And it's quite unfortunate to say the least, but it's something I'm going to talk about at another time.

What I want to talk about today, Madam Speaker, is Nalcor. We've had some discussion, certainly in Question Period today, around the former CEO's contract and how that went down, who knew what and so on, but that's not really the piece I want to talk about. I want to talk about, I guess, Nalcor in general.

I want to talk about the Muskrat Falls Project, a project that I did stand up and vote for, and I've openly – it's on the record anyway. I have no problem saying that I did because I did at the time based on the information I was provided, my colleagues were provided. I did so in what I felt to be the best interest of the people and of my constituents at the time. Based on the information, as I said, that was provided and taking the word of people as to the information that you were given was accurate information, that the assumptions were correct, that the numbers were correct and not being in here ourselves. Certainly, I guess, we've had engineers who have been MHAs. In the past, we've had lawyers. We have lawyers here, but a lot of us are not necessarily engineers or experts of electricity and so on, so we have to take advice and the best advice we can get from the people who we feel ought to know the appropriate information and we all vote on things based on that advice and so on.

But, as we know, Nalcor has been, I guess, shrouded in controversy now for many, many months and it's around a number of issues. One of the issues, of course, was DarkNL. We all know what happened with that. We all know about the subsequent Liberty report which came out. And, of course, in their Liberty report, basically the reason why we had DarkNL was because a decision had been made by officials at Newfoundland Hydro – I guess you can expand

that, Nalcor, and expand that again perhaps, the minister of the day, the Premier of the day, who knows, but a decision had been made not to do maintenance, not to do maintenance in Holyrood.

As a result of that maintenance not getting done, we ended up with people in the dark for a number of days. Some people lost their power for longer than others. Some people feared – well, for some people it was actually an opportunity for the family to get together and actually spend some time together and spend time as a family and have barbecues and whatever the case might be to get through it and lite the wood stove or the fireplace, if you had one, and so on.

It was a positive experience in some regard for some people, but for other people and a lot of people, of course, you know, we had senior citizens that had to be evacuated from nursing homes and we had people who just certainly couldn't cope with the power outage and they were cold and in the dark and so on, like I said, particularly people who might be seniors, persons with disabilities and all those issues. The village mall, the pipes burst and shut down the village for a number of months and people lost their jobs for a significant period of time. No money coming in the door.

So there were a lot of negative impacts of DarkNL. And, like I said, when we go back to the Liberty report we find out that somebody with Newfoundland Power – or sorry, correction, Newfoundland Hydro and, I guess, Nalcor, decided we weren't going to do basic maintenance in Holyrood on the equipment. And instead of us finding out after the fact, once all this came to light that there were pink slips handed out, instead of hearing about pink slips, we heard that they were handing out corporate bonuses – great job, b'ys, great job. Couldn't keep the lights on, and everyone gets a bonus, and no heads rolled at all, which is quite mindboggling when you think about. And it certainly wouldn't happen in private industry – at least none of the private companies I worked for, I can guarantee you that.

And that's just one issue. And then of course we know, I guess, the controversy, as we talked about, that happened as the result of the former

CEO departing. And, at the time, we also know the former chair of the board and allegations that he made. He was making allegations of conflict of interest. Then the most troubling part about that is that this was something that I can remember it was in CBC at the time, and talking about the fact, well, I know for sure there were conflicts of interest. But if you knew it, if he knew it then, he knew it months prior, but he never said anything months prior, so why would that be? And then that leads you to believe, or question at least, could there be other potential conflicts of interest. I'm not saying there are. I'm not using my words; I'm using his that were put out there publicly.

Of course, we look at the Muskrat Falls Project now, and I can remember when it was debated here in the House and so on, and I can remember the issue of methylmercury being brought forward. Certainly I was told, and my colleagues at the time told, yeah, this project could have an impact in terms of methylmercury, but we're confident that it won't be an issue, that levels will be acceptable and so on.

Now here we are, well into the project, and there are still outstanding issues, and it seems like the information we were given was not correct information. Certainly, there's a lot of conflicting information. We were told at the time – I can remember when the issue of the North spur was raised, and there were people raising that issue. And I went to Nalcor's AGM – it was at the Holiday Inn – and that question was put to the floor, to the former CEO. He deferred it to the gentleman in charge of the project – and I forget what his title it, but anyway – who said, we are aware of the North spur issue. We have an engineering solution in place, and that engineering solution is included in the cost estimates – which at the time was \$6 billion.

Have it in place, and it's included in the \$6 billion. Now we know, of course, that still seems to be up in the air and, obviously, it wasn't included in the \$6 billion because we're gone way beyond that now. We're up to eleven-point-something billion dollars and people are saying it could grow even further.

We've seen all of the overruns, the huge overruns, the massive overruns that have

occurred and all the time delays and all the things that have happened. And because of all these things and because of all these numbers that were put out there, people have lost confidence. There are allegations out there now, if you look on – I realize social media is not the be all and end all, I can guarantee you that and there's a lot of hearsay, but certainly there's a blog out there now in social media whereby allegedly there's an engineer who's come forward anonymously, who allegedly worked on the project, who said that he had to quit. He had to quit working on that project, quit working for Nalcor because of false numbers being generated and put out there to the public – fudging of numbers.

Now, that's what's out there. Now, I don't know; I can't swear if that's true or if it's not true. It's all allegations. It's all hearsay, but it's very concerning. It's very concerning for me, as somebody who stood up here and voted for that based on what I felt was the accurate information from the people who were in the know or ought to have been in the know, the so-called experts.

I stood up and voted for it and other people did. I feel betrayed and hoodwinked. Quite frankly, that's how I feel, by having information and assumptions put out there that now, obviously, is not the case – obviously, it's not the case. The numbers are nowhere close to what we said the numbers were going to be and lots of information that we were told here is not the reality today. I'm very concerned about that and I know Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are very concerned about that.

So, with all that said, what are we going to do about it? What can we do about it? I realize the government have said they're doing things to try to get the project on track and on time and on budget. Well, it's not going to be on budget but, I mean, obviously, to try to make best they can of a bad situation. One can argue whether they're doing enough or they're not doing enough or whatever, and I'm not going to argue that. I'm sure they're doing the best they can, but with all of the concerns that have been raised, it is beyond me why everybody in this House would not agree to bring the Auditor General into Nalcor to do a complete, thorough review of their operations and to look at matters

that have been raised. To look at the issues around DarkNL, who knew what, who told who we weren't going to do maintenance and why. And, if those individuals are still there, who they were given their marching orders from if they were; to look into these allegations of conflicts of interest, to look into these allegations of false numbers and information being put out there. To look into all of these contracts that have been awarded at Muskrat Falls and so on and the huge overruns.

The Auditor General should be in there to do that. Now, the Auditor General is in there right now. We know he's in there now because the public took it upon themselves in an email campaign –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MADAM SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. LANE: – to contact the Auditor General, basically and to fill his email box up with requests to go into Nalcor. And thankfully, he has agreed and he's in there now.

The problem we have, though, Madam Speaker, the problem we have is that he only has a finite number of resources and basically they're just going in there, they're going to pick a couple of items, some small bite-size chunks if you will, a couple of things they can look at, and bring forward a report either in the spring or this fall.

We don't know what it is that he's going to look at or what he's not going to look at. I certainly would hope he's going to look at the more serious things and the more serious allegations than to simply just look at some routine matters and come forward with a report on some day-to-day operational routine matters. I hope he's going to look into the more serious issues, but we don't know that.

What needs to happen is that Members of the House collectively, we need to give the Auditor General the go ahead. We need to say to the Auditor General, we want you to go into Nalcor and we're going to provide you with all the resources you require to do a full analysis of the operations at Nalcor, to do a full analysis of some of these controversies and allegations, some of these contracts that have been awarded

to get to the bottom of it and clear the air once and for all so that we know our Crown corporation is working in our best interest.

I'm not saying they're not. I don't know if they are or if they are not. I honestly don't know. I know there are an awful lot of inconsistencies and I know the price of Muskrat Falls has gone through the roof. And I know there have been all kinds of allegations made, whether they're true or not, I don't know, but they're out there. They're being made and people have concerns.

I don't know why we wouldn't simply bring in the AG now. He's in there now anyway, give him the resources he needs to do a full, comprehensive review and come forward with a report so that we can finally clear the air. And if there are things that happened that shouldn't be happening, to clean it up; if that means having to make wholesale changes, that's what it means. If it means having to bring in the authorities, if that's what it means, that's what it means. And I don't know if it does or doesn't, I have no idea. I'm not suggesting they would, but whatever needs to happen, give them the authority to go in there, do the review, do what we have to do to clean it up and restore the people's faith in our Crown corporation. Because that faith has been lost, the faith has been lost.

Even though we have a new CEO, Mr. Marshall, and I'm not questioning his integrity, ability or whatever, but simply just changing the person sitting in that seat is not going to cut it if there's been all kinds of things done, all the other same players are in place and these matters are not being brought forward to the public in a transparent manner.

So, Mr. Speaker, I really believe, I honestly believe that's what we need to do, and I can't see why every Member of this House would not be supportive of doing that. I can't understand – I wrote the Premier months ago and I requested it. I never even got a reply to the letter, not even: I've received your correspondence, thank you for your feedback. Nothing. So I can only assume he doesn't want to do it. And I don't know why he wouldn't, especially given the fact that all the issues I've described all happened under a former administration. It's not like he was even there. It's not even like this government was there.

It's just mindboggling why we wouldn't want to do it. It needs to be done in order to restore people's faith in our Crown corporation. A Crown corporation, by the way, that's a huge part of our future. Whether it be oil and gas or whether it be other forms of energy, it's going to play a significant role, a huge role in our future, and there's no reason why we wouldn't all want to right the ship, to get to the bottom of any controversy that's there and to clear the air, take whatever action needs to be taken and move forward. There's no reason why in this House of Assembly, why every Member here shouldn't want to do that. It needs to be done. It needs to be done as soon as possible because we're still spending billions. We're still spending billions.

Before I run out of time, I do want to say as well, that while we hear all of this controversy and while I raise this today, this is no way a reflection of the lot of good people that are there at Nalcor and with Newfoundland Hydro and so on who are out in the worst kind of weather, working the lines and all the other things they do. There are very qualified, capable people there that work hard every day, and I'm sure it's a black eye on them. I've talked to a couple of them who've said that morale is really, really poor in a lot of cases because that shadow is hanging over that organization. And they feel it, and they shouldn't have to.

It's no different than what was said here, the Minister of Justice said earlier when he talked about the RNC. Just because there were a couple of incidents or a bad apple here or there, which you find in every organization, we shouldn't tar the RNC with a negative brush. If there are individuals, or if there are issues that happen, you deal with those. But, by large it's a great organization, the RNC is. And Nalcor I'm sure is no different; very qualified, very professional people, but we need to get to the bottom of the issues which are causing all of the concern for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I certainly call upon all my colleagues here today, particularly the minister and the government, to give the – the AG is in there now, give him the mandate to do a sweeping review and provide him with the resources to do so.

MR. SPEAKER (Warr): Order, please!

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'm pleased to get up today and to speak in the time allotted for the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne.

I'm sure that people who are watching may not be fully aware of the procedures in the House, that the Speech from the Throne was given when this session first started on March 8, 2016. So almost a year ago, but as long as this session of the House runs, then the Speech from the Throne is the framework that government presented and on which it bases its budget. So we don't take the time immediately after the Speech from the Throne for everybody to get up and to reply to it. It gets spread out throughout the whole session. So I'm very glad today to finally take my 20 minutes in doing that.

I think it's a very timely moment also to have 20 minutes to speak to the issues that are going on in the province today and this is what the Speech from the Throne is about, but there was one thing in the Speech from the Throne that I'm going to focus on because it is actually timely and it has to do with what the Speech from the Throne said about education.

In the Speech from the Throne, the government did make its commitment to set up a task force, a Premier's Task Force on Educational Outcomes, and they've done that and that's great. But I think it's really important to reflect on some of the things that the task force has been tasked with as a task force, and it's something that the government had in the Speech from the Throne. And it was part and is part of the mandate of the task force.

There are a number of topics that the task force was asked to deal with: early learning, mathematics, reading and literacy, inclusive education, student mental health and wellness, and multicultural education, Aboriginal

education, teacher education and professional development.

What I'd like to concentrate on in speaking during my Address in Reply is looking at the whole issue of inclusive education and something I think that has become linked to that as well, and that's student mental health and wellness.

The task force has been going around the province listening to the concerns of parents, of teachers, of students, of guardians, of communities, listening to their concerns about our educational system. This week, they are actually here in St. John's. They had a hearing last Thursday night. I think it was in St. John's and they have another one tonight. I'm looking forward to presenting at that one tonight.

They end of Thursday. They'll be in Gander Thursday night, I know, and that'll be their last consultation. It won't be the end of their work but it will be last consultation that they're holding. People will still be able to present written documentation to them and there's a deadline for that. I can't remember what that deadline is, sometime in March, and they will continue doing the work and come up with a report that they have to come up with in a short period of time, actually, for the government.

And what has been striking me, because I have been following the process, is the degree to which presenters are concentrating on the whole issue of inclusive education and what's happening in our schools. And none of us is against inclusive education. However, since it was put in place in 2009, there have been nothing but complaints from people, from parents, from teachers, from special ed teachers, from guidance councillors, from school psychologists, and what they're complaining about is that the program has not been adequately resourced in order for it to work.

And even the Minister of Education has said publicly – the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, he himself has said publicly that the system is not working, that the system has to be restructured in order to work. And that's really something. I'm glad that the minister was honest publicly and made that acknowledgement to the people of this province

because if it isn't acknowledged, if we don't recognize that the system is not working, then it's not going to be fixed.

And so I'm very happy to know that the minister responsible recognizes that it's not working, and I hope that means that the task force of very experienced, professional people – I have great hope in them. I have confidence that they will have the same attitude as the minister and will go far in making recommendations that will try to help fix the system.

Over the years, especially since 2009, I have had many groups, many individuals, parents, organizations, such as the Newfoundland and Labrador Autism Association, coming and talking about their concerns. And the issue that is very, very clear is because there aren't adequate resources in place in the school system, because there aren't enough itinerant teachers, because there aren't enough student assistants, because there aren't enough instructional resource teachers, because there aren't enough guidance counsellors, what is happening is that nobody's needs are being met. The children who have special needs, the children who have exceptionalities, they do not have adequate resources, adequate supports.

Because of that, in the classroom where all the children are together, without adequate support, the teacher who's in charge of that classroom is finding that he or she is having to spend so much time dealing with the students with exceptionalities that other students are just being left to fend on their own. And the message that I'm getting and, from what I can hear, the task force is getting is that nobody is benefiting. Everybody is being hurt by this. And it's not acceptable.

One of the things that I think is at the basis of all this is what government is basing its decision making in. One of the things that seem to be lacking is their understanding of where to start. In 2007, there was a study of teacher allocation, and the teacher allocation commission did a report. The report stated that teacher allocation should be grounded in the needs of each individual school. And the direct quote is: "It is there that students meet teachers. It is there that improvements and developments in education must be rooted and rationalized."

But what has happened is that the model that has been developed, and that was implemented in 2008, only partly is based on needs and, therefore, does not meet the needs of all students. That's the problem; it's only partially based on that. And what has been happening is that it is budget cuts that are running the show. And if we are basing the decisions on how our educational system proceeds, if we're basing those decisions on how to cut money, then we are going to continue really letting our students be let down. They are being let down by the government. They are being let down by the system – and their parents.

Budget 2013 cut 160 teachers from the school system. Now, *Budget 2014* earmarked new funds for itinerant teachers and student assistants and classroom aides; but, in 2015, we we're being told by the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association that we need, at that moment, an additional 150 teaching units in order to properly implement inclusive education – 150.

Budget 2016 earmarked 27 new teaching units, 27 for inclusive education. The teachers' association – and they've been loud and clear – are telling us at that time in 2015, 150 were needed. And at the same time, the government earmarked only 27 new teaching units in 2016, and then also they increased the class-size caps. They were increased for grades four to 12, and more multigrade classrooms were created at the same time that the classrooms had –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. MICHAEL: – every child in the system in those classrooms with all kinds of exceptionalities.

So we have a problem. We have a problem in understanding what inclusive education is all about. We have a problem in understanding what an inclusive system looks like, and we have a problem in understanding what the resources are that can make that work. Because there are some times you may have a child who's in the classroom with all his or her peers, and then needs to be taken out of the classroom

in order to deal with a special need that that child has in learning.

That child then has to have somebody out of the classroom with him or her to do what is needed at that time with that child. Because inclusive education doesn't mean for every minute of the day a child with exceptionalities is going to be sitting in a desk in a classroom. But if we have a teacher, an instructional resource teacher having to cover two or three children in a classroom – and we are being told that's what's happening, then what happens to the other two children or the other one child when the instructional resource teacher steps out with the child who, for a period of time, needs to be out of the classroom? What happens is the classroom teacher has to take over.

Now, if the extra child or extra two children that the instructional resource teacher was responsible for, if those children still have their needs, which they do, and the classroom teacher now has to take care of their needs, what happens to the other children in the classroom?

This is the kind of thing that's going on in 2017 in our province. And this is what has to change. So we have to have a move from the thing of saying here's the budget, here's how much money, make it work. That's not the way to do it. It is: what are the needs? Are we going to do inclusive education? What are the needs? What are the resources that have to be there? How are we going to make it work? And then government has the responsibility to have the budget to make that work. It has to be a priority. This is the issue; it has to be a priority. If government is going to do this, if it's going to – and I think we should have inclusive education, then it has to look at what it's been doing.

Now, it was interesting – and I know this is something that is being contested. But as part of the last collective bargaining that went on between the NLTA and the provincial government, a committee was set up, the joint inclusive education committee. And this committee was set up to review inclusive education and they were doing their work in 2015 and 2016. But the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development prevented the committee from making recommendations for changing the teacher

allocations, for guidance counsellors, for educational psychologists and for instructional resource teachers.

The government, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development prevented the committee from making recommendations. The committee had proposed recommendations that were key to the problems identified by the committee. The committee was ready to go forward and they presented the recommendations, and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development said no, those recommendations cannot be made and we are not paying attention to any recommendations with regard to the teacher allocations.

Now, this is absolutely unbelievable. It is absolutely unbelievable. Why take part? Why set up the committee? Why do this work – work that was being done by professionals, whether in the teaching profession or in the department, they were all working together, work done by professionals identifying the needs. And the department says no, you can't make any recommendations. They stopped that from happening.

So I hope when the minister says that he knows the system is broken and he knows what has to be done, that he is going to take leadership and change that. He's going to say we have to make changes to the teacher allocation for inclusive education. We have to make changes, and it's going to mean hiring more people. It's going to mean making sure that we have enough itinerant teachers. It's going to mean that we have enough instructional resource teachers. It's going to mean that we are going to have adequate guidance counsellors. Guidance counsellors now – and this is where I want to make the connection to mental health and wellness. Guidance counsellors now, in a lot of cases, are spending so much of their time dealing with the whole issue of children with exceptionalities that the work that they regularly do as guidance counsellors is falling by the wayside, because they're having to do the work that other people should be doing but we do not have the resources there for other people to be doing that work.

So children who have mental health issues, children who have whatever, behavioural issues, whatever, that aren't related to being children with exceptionalities, just relates to life that children, you know, are living today that those children are being ignored. Those children are also suffering.

So the inclusive education is not working for the children with exceptionalities. Their parents are saying it. The organizations that represent them are saying it. Children who are aren't identified as having exceptionalities but children in the classroom and who are there, you know, just like the others, they're not having their needs met as well so nobody is benefiting.

We may have some places where things are working okay. I'm not saying there isn't a place where things may be working okay. But, in general, what's happening is a disgrace in this day and age. So government has to start paying attention.

There was a panel last year, 2015-2016, set up by the NLTA. It was set up by the NLTA and it had representation from the Federation of School Councils and Memorial University. The parents and teachers raised many concerns and here were some of the things that they raised. This is over a year ago, their report came out.

Insufficient resources for inclusion; teacher allocations that don't meet the need; instructional resource teachers responsible for so many students that they can't provide individualized instruction – so what's it all about? If the instructional teacher, if that person cannot provide individualized instruction, what's it all about? Children with high needs or behavioural issues disrupting the education of other students; children with autism subjected to a detrimentally high turnover of student assistants. For example, with children with autism, with anybody with autism one of the things that are really important in their lives is consistency. They cannot deal with, for the most part, for example, continuous change. So if they don't have the same student or the same teacher with them, they are going to be upset. They are going to be confused. They can't deal with it.

I personally know this. I have a nephew who is on the autism spectrum, but he was out in BC. I

know that for a number of years, not only did he have the same person working with him during the day, he had the same person go with him for a number of years, and that's what's important is that consistency.

MS. ROGERS: Continuity.

MS. MICHAEL: It's the continuity.

So government has got to look at, really study what inclusive education means, and put the resources in place. I feel really confident that the task force is going to be saying and reflecting some of the things that I've said here today because we really do have good people on that task force.

Government are the ones who are going to have to really, you know, say okay, we've got to take this seriously. Because, folks, if we don't, we're going to be no further ahead in 10 years' time. So this government has a real responsibility to look at the budget it's putting together and to make sure that it's based, with regard to the educational aspect, based on the needs of the children in our schools.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

At this point I would move, seconded by the Minister of Natural Resources, that the House do now adjourn.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

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