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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.

**Statements by Members**

**MR. SPEAKER:** For Members' statements today we have the Members for the Districts of Labrador West, St. John's East – Quidi Vidi, Stephenville – Port au Port, Cape St. Francis, Harbour Grace – Port de Grave, and Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune.

The hon. the Member for Labrador West.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. LETTO:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to congratulate the Royal Canadian Legion of Labrador West on another successful legion telethon held on Sunday, April 5.

This year's telethon marked the 32nd year for the event and their co-chair persons Bernie Denief and Vida Connors. The total raised on Sunday was \$22,000 bringing the total raised over the years to \$2 million.

All money raised at this event is directed to two recipients – 10 per cent is given to the Janeway Children's Hospital with the remaining being donated to the Labrador West Health Centre to purchase equipment throughout the hospital.

CRRS, the community broadcasting station, has been an integral part of this event since its inception and continues to air the telethon from 12 noon until 9 p.m. Major sponsors like PAL, Fitz's Enterprises and 5 Star Motors have consistently provided incentives to encourage people to donate to this very worthwhile cause.

Mr. Speaker, this is truly a community effort and an excellent example of how the community can partner with government to provide the best possible health care for its residents.

I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating the Royal Canadian Legion and

in particular Bernie and Vida on their 32 year commitment to this very successful event.

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.

It is my great pleasure to congratulate a constituent who recently celebrated her 100th birthday.

Trudy Anne Green was born in St. John's on April 13, 1917. Her parents were Donald and Jennie Butler; Donald was a partner in Butler Brothers, a well-known stationary business on Water Street.

Trudy lived through the Depression and Commission of Government. She attended Prince of Wales College and Memorial University College before graduating as a nurse from Montreal's Royal Victoria Hospital. She practiced nursing then married her childhood sweetheart Jack Green. Following Jack's discharge from the air force, he worked at the *Evening Telegram* and Trudy devoted herself to homemaking. Their only child, Derek, currently the Chief Justice of Newfoundland and Labrador, was born in 1947.

Since Jack's death in 2004, Trudy has lived independently making a life for herself focused on her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She is a vibrant woman of strong opinions and enthusiastic conversation. In the last decade, she took typing lessons so she could use the computer and communicate with friends and family on the mainland.

Please join me in congratulating a woman who has seen so much of our history but is very definitely – as defined by her son – a woman of 2017.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. FINN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last evening the Town of Stephenville, in partnership with the Town of Kippens, held the 38th annual Stephen awards. The event honoured community volunteers with appreciation awards, and awarded the Citizen of the Year, Youth of the Year, as well as various athletes of the year.

Ranging in age from 15 to 91, 24 citizens from 24 different community organizations were recognized for their tremendous contributions to community and sport.

Gia Caul was named junior female Athlete of the Year, and Kip Deeley was named junior male Athlete of the Year. The Youth of the Year award winner was Stephanie Budden and the Citizen of the Year award went to Rosie Verma.

A sincere thank you to the Stephen awards committee and various business sponsors that made this event possible and congratulations to all those who were nominated and received awards.

These amazing volunteers and athletes provide an invaluable service which significantly contributes to the region's cultural, social and economic fabric.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

I rise in this hon. House today to recognize a group of amateur actors, jokesters, singers, dancers and musicians. Since 1968, the Concert Crowd for Logy Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cove has entertained audiences; that's for 49 years.

This year's performance was called *Shelia's Brush*, written by local resident Karen Carrol, a tale of how best intentions can be led down the

wrong path. There was no snowstorm, but it was a very enjoyable night.

The performance takes months of preparation. What started in a local school grew to large audiences – this year it had a sold-out audience, a full house at the Arts and Culture Centre. I had the opportunity to attend the show. The laughter and smiles on everyone's faces made for a very successful year.

The Concert Crowd has donated \$160,000 to groups like the Red Cross, Canadian Cancer Society, Kidney Foundation, Rainbow Riders, Community Food Sharing Association, VOCCM Cares Foundation, Alzheimer's Society, the RNC DARE program, the CNIB, the medical emergency support, The Gathering Place and the St. Francis of Assisi Parish cemetery and others.

I ask all hon. Members to join with me in congratulating the Concert Crowd on another very successful year.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

Good afternoon, today I would like to recognize the team at Central United Church in Bay Roberts. This group of dedicated parishioners have gone above and beyond to support members of our communities by offering a complementary Lenten Outreach Soup's On Project.

This involves both a takeout service to those who are alone, dealing with medical issues and other challenges, to enjoy a delivered hot lunch, while others come along to the Christian education centre adjacent to the church to socialize and enjoy a homemade, hearty bowl of soup and a dessert.

To date, approximately 600 lunches have been served. There are about 35 volunteers who, on Tuesdays, prepare the hearty ingredients for the soups and, on Wednesdays, cook, deliver the meals, serve the sit-in guests and clean up. This year the project began March 1 and continued until April 5. Residents of multiple surrounding

communities enjoy this community event each year. Mr. Speaker, I also enjoy attending and, on occasion, I have also brought my guitar along to sing for the crowd.

Please join me in congratulating Irish Partridge and all the volunteers of the Bay Roberts-Shearstown United Church Pastoral Charge on their fourth annual Soup's On Project.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MS. PERRY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to deliver accolades to the Coast of Bays talented participants in the 52nd Central Newfoundland Kiwanis Music Festival. Thanks to our music instructors for their hard work and dedication with our region's exceptionally talented performers.

It is an honour for me to extend congratulations to all the performers, too numerous to list, who shone at the festival. From singing to playing piano, solo speeches, to traditional Mi'kmaq songs, our students excelled, placing first, second and third in various categories. Whether you were a first time or a veteran performer, all glowing reports emphasized your poise and outstanding talent.

I would also like to throw a bouquet out to McKenna, Destiny and Kailee Benoit, Se't A'newey Vocal Ensemble, and our Hennessey Memorial Rose Bowl Recipient Jessica Willcott, who all performed at Highlights of the Festival. Congratulations to Brandi Jeddore, recipient of the Ron Ennis Award for best traditional folk song, and Destiny Benoit, recipient of the Adjudicator's Award for Vocal Achievement.

I ask all Members of this hon. House to join me, along with your classmates, teachers and community residents in extending congratulations to all participants for their excellent performances.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Statements by Ministers.

### Statements by Ministers

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today I rise in this hon. House to commemorate the sacrifices made by our naval, air and merchant veterans during the Battle of the Atlantic.

The Battle of the Atlantic was a struggle between the Allied and German forces for control of the Atlantic Ocean. It brought the Second World War to Canada's doorstep, and is considered to be the longest and arguably the most strategically significant battle of the war.

Canada's Merchant Navy, along with the Royal Canadian Navy and the Royal Canadian Air Force, played a key role in the Allied efforts. East coast cities soon found themselves involved in the battle, since Allied convoys were frequently visiting and leaving busy ports like Halifax and Sydney, Nova Scotia, as well as St. John's during the war.

Mr. Speaker, helping the Allies triumph in the Battle of the Atlantic came at a very high price with more than 1,600 Merchant Navy personnel from Canada and Newfoundland and Labrador being killed, as well as 2,000 Royal Canadian Navy officers and men who died during the war and some 752 members of the Royal Canadian Air Force. The Battle of the Atlantic also saw civilian casualties – we remember 136 people died when the ferry, S.S. *Caribou*, was sunk as it crossed from Nova Scotia to Newfoundland on October 14, 1942.

It is safe to say the Allied victory in the Second World War would not have been possible without victory at sea. While it required overcoming great odds, the courage of the naval, air and merchant personnel helped to keep the Allied convoys running and the supply lines to Europe open. These brave men and women were some of the more than one million Canadians and Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who

served in the cause of peace and freedom during the Second World War.

On May 7, 2017, the Battle of the Atlantic ceremonies will commence with an ecumenical service at the St. Thomas' Anglican Church followed by a parade to the Newfoundland War Memorial for a wreath-laying ceremony. In addition, as a mark of respect to those who fought in the Battle of the Atlantic to ensure our freedom, the Naval Ensign will be flown on the courtesy pole here at Confederation Building throughout this week.

I invite all hon. Members to join me in commemorating and celebrating our naval heritage, and most importantly, our naval, air and merchant veterans of past and present.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

I thank the Premier for an advance copy of his statement today. On behalf of my colleagues in the Official Opposition, I join with government in commemorating our province and country's naval heritage, especially the heritage surrounding the Battle of the Atlantic.

As the Premier alluded to, this conflict began in 1939 and lasted until 1945 making it the longest, continuous military conflict of the Second World War. I'd like to take a moment, Mr. Speaker, to acknowledge and thank all of those who served in Canada's Merchant Navy, Royal Canadian Navy, Royal Canadian Air Force, and all who supported the war effort on the home front. These brave men and women who served in these divisions showed great courage, bravery and duty to our country.

I would also like to take a moment to encourage everyone to recognize the contribution of these brave men and women by attending the commemorative ecumenical service and wreath-laying ceremony taking place on Sunday.

To all those who have served in the armed forces and to those who continue to serve, I offer my sincere gratitude and respect.

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, too, thank the Premier for the advance copy of his statement. The Battle of the Atlantic transformed St. John's Harbour into a key convoy base for shipping across the North Atlantic. More than 12,000 Newfoundlanders out of a population of almost 322,000 were directly or indirectly involved in the war effort, many who served in the Merchant Marine braving German submarine attacks to get vital supplies to Great Britain. We must always remember the brave people who stepped up and risked, and in some cases lost their lives in the war effort.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. TRIMPER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House to reflect on the National Day of Mourning, which was recently recognized on April 28, 2017.

The National Day of Mourning is a time to remember those who have been injured or who have died in a workplace. As we do that, it is important to also reflect on how we can further improve occupational health and safety. Our government, in conjunction with all partners in the province's workplace health, safety and compensation system, must continue our efforts towards preventing workplace incidents.

Mr. Speaker, I was honoured to participate in the wreath-laying ceremony last Friday at Confederation Building with the hon. Minister

Responsible for the Human Resource Secretariat, Members of the House of Assembly, and others who laid a wreath in memory of a loved one or a co-worker. I want to thank the St. John's and District Labour Council for organizing this very important event.

WorkplaceNL recently announced new data that show the incidence of workplace injury and illness in Newfoundland and Labrador continues to decline and was at an all-time low in 2016.

However, there were still 13 work-related fatalities in 2016, eight of which were the result of occupational disease. Mr. Speaker, one workplace fatality is too many. The National Day of Mourning serves as a reminder that we still need to be vigilant and ensure that safety is the priority for our workforce.

Promoting safe workplaces and communities is a priority for our government, and we will continue to collaborate with our partners to help ensure workers return home safe and sound at the end of each and every shift.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

I want to thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. The National Day of Mourning, which was recognized on Friday, is a very meaningful day for remembering workers who have been killed or injured on the job. It's important to the families, friends, co-workers of those individuals, and it also highlights the importance of ensuring safety in the workplace.

Safety should be first and foremost at any workplace. It's important that proper procedures and policies are in place to reduce the number of work-related injuries, illnesses and fatalities. We should do everything we can to ensure workers in our province have a safe and healthy workplace.

Thank you very much, 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 too thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. Thirteen people died in this province last year because of workplace-related injury or illness, eight who died of industrial disease. Nobody should be harmed or die while trying to make a living.

We need legislation covering front-line worker emergency responders for PTSD and heart disease. We need legislation preventing night flights to offshore places. But there is much more needed, and I urge government to get the job done.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. HAGGIE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House to recognize today as the start of Mental Health Week in Newfoundland and Labrador, and across Canada.

Following last year's successful Get Loud campaign, the theme this year is Get Ready to Get Loud. Confederation Building will be lit green this week in recognition of Mental Health Week.

Each of us has a part to play in ending the stigma around mental health. I encourage everyone – individuals, families, schools, advocacy groups and communities – to stand up, speak out and talk openly about mental health.

Mental Health Week is a time to raise awareness about the challenges of mental health and for people to reflect on their own self-care. One of our many partners, the Canadian Mental Association, highlights that positive mental health involves how we feel, think, act and interact with the world around us. Positive

mental health is about coping with stress and making a contribution to our community.

Mr. Speaker, *Budget 2017* recognizes the need for improved services in the area of mental health including: an extra \$73 million over 10 years through the Canadian Health Accord; an investment of \$7.5 million to advance the replacement of the Waterford Hospital; and an initial \$5 million to begin immediate implementation of the All-Party Committee report recommendations.

On the first day of Mental Health Week, I am pleased to inform this hon. House that our government is on track to release its mental health and addictions action plan in June of this year.

In closing, I want to thank the many groups, organizations and individuals throughout the province who continue to advocate on mental health issues.

I ask my hon. colleagues to join me and Get Loud for mental health.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. KENT:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement today, and we join with government in recognizing Mental Health Week in our province and in our country. The stigma that surrounds mental health is one of the biggest hindrances faced by those who cope with mental illness. Events like Mental Health Week are vitally important in addressing those issues.

Advocacy work by the Canadian Mental Health Association and numerous other groups and individuals over many years have facilitated an attitudinal transition. It has changed the very way we think about and react to mental illness. While progress has been significant and we should celebrate many victories, the challenges that remain are equally as significant. It's for that reason that we must remain diligent and be

willing to get loud for mental health. We need to ensure that people get the cure they need, when they need it.

As recently evident by the work of the All-Party Committee, by working together we can make the system better, and I look forward to the implementation plan next month.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MS. ROGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. Mayday is an international distress signal and, in that spirit, the Community Coalition for Mental Health and Addictions is organizing a Mayday in mental health and addictions town hall for community members and organizations to discuss mental health and addictions in light of the report of the All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions towards recovery.

The goal is to work together to find solutions based on harm reduction, through collaboration with community and inclusion. This is a good next step for government and community to continue to work together. Everyone is welcome tonight, 7 p.m., at City Hall.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Oral Questions.

#### Oral Questions

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

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Speaker, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador have reached a new level of concern with this Liberal government. The Premier

reached a secret, special arrangement with his former clerk, giving him permission to continue to practise law while acting as the top bureaucrat in the provincial government.

I ask the Premier to provide details of the secret arrangement that he made with the former clerk, Bern Coffey.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, first of all, let me assure the people of the province there was no secret arrangement at all. The employment contract was put out this morning, proactively, disclosed to the people of the province. The Members opposite, I'm sure, would have a copy of that by now, so no secret contract.

What it is with Mr. Coffey when he came to work in September of last year – we accepted his resignation last night on April 30, Mr. Speaker – there was a time frame that was given from anyone who comes from private life, enters in to public life, a time frame for a transition from his previous life into public life.

The transition time that we agreed to yesterday was not acceptable. It wasn't moving as quickly as we would have hoped. Mr. Coffey did his job as clerk, Mr. Speaker; I outlined this in a press conference this morning. So it was really about the transition period that took place and it was something that we could not agree to.

**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.

There should never have been a transition.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Mr. Speaker, Mr. Coffey had indicated that his legal work was sanctioned by

the Premier, even though the public wasn't made aware of it.

I ask the Premier: Was the Cabinet and your caucus made aware of your secret arrangement before the story was reported by the media?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all to the former premier's comment about a transition period is not acceptable, well, Mr. Speaker, if you were the premier of this province – and we know that former premiers would have taken a considerable amount of time. So is he suggesting that someone comes from private life into public life, that there's not a transition period that's agreeable?

These things happen. It's the reason why there's a blind trust that's put in place. They take time. So in the legal world or in the political world, these are not unusual circumstances, Mr. Speaker.

No secret arrangement at all. The contract has been out there publicly now, Mr. Speaker, with the former clerk. That contract is available publicly. We just ran to the point where the transition time would have taken longer and Mr. Coffey offered his resignation.

**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.

Mr. Speaker, there shouldn't have been a transition period because he should never have hired a Liberal friend to the clerk of Executive Council in the first place.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier: Did he seek any ethical or legal advice on the hiring of Mr. Coffey?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.



**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To the Member opposite, when he talks about political appointments and so on, I can assure that the whole province and many politicians could take a lesson from the appointments that they had made.

Now, Mr. Speaker, is he suggesting that – as I said this morning, Mr. Coffey certainly wasn't appointed because of a political or any affiliation to any political party. But is he suggesting that we should not hire the best people that are available to us, or is he suggesting that if one of those people happened to be some Tory supporter or some NDP supporter, that we should not consider them for jobs in great political roles in our province?

Is he suggesting that there's no Tory available to be clerk or no Tory available to be deputy minister, Mr. Speaker? We look for the best people that are available to us and, goodness knows, we have a big job to do thanks to the mess that they've left us in.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

Well, I remind the Premier that he allowed his Liberal friend, Mr. Coffey, to take the office of the highest ranking public employee who's effectively in charge of all of government and to sue government entities while he oversaw the actual government operations, Mr. Speaker. The Premier allowed that to happen.

I ask the Premier: Do you believe that the actions of Mr. Coffey, the deal that you reached with him, break the conflict of interest law and the concept of conflict of interest?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, first of all, to the comments that's been made by the former premier about an individual

like Mr. Coffey, I think the whole province would recognize the great work that he would have done with the Cameron inquiry and other work that would have been done in the province, I say, Mr. Speaker.

So to make comments about an individual and the role that he's played in the development of our province, Mr. Speaker, is a bit – I would consider to be disingenuous for the work that's been done.

Mr. Speaker, number one, I'll say it for the third time I think now already, no secret deal with the former clerk; no secret deal at all. That contract's been out there.

As the Member knows, any conflict of interest, the onus is on the individual, the responsibility is on the individual to declare that conflict, Mr. Speaker. That was clearly outlined in section 11 of the employment contract. There was a mechanism in place for that to occur.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

Well, I remind the Premier, he's the Premier of the province and the onus is on him to make sure it's done right, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. P. DAVIS:** The responsibility falls squarely with the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, we're not questioning the legal past or legal history of Mr. Coffey, we're questioning the appointment made by the Premier.

I ask the Premier: Was the conflict of interest advisory committee consulted prior to the appointment of Mr. Coffey?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, in the past, in the prior administration, I'm sure the former premier would know this. He would know that when executive people are put in place, as an example like the clerk, what happens is you get a member from Justice – that happened. You get someone in Cabinet Secretariat. Mr. Speaker, that happened.

In this particular case, being the Premier, the clerk is essentially the deputy minister for the Premier. Those meetings happened, Mr. Speaker. There was a process that was put in place. There were conflict walls; some people refer to these as Chinese walls, is something we've heard in recent days.

Mr. Speaker, there were conflict walls that were put in place to take care of the existing issues and files that Mr. Coffey was working on. Cabinet Secretariat was aware of it, and there was consultation with the Justice department, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

It was a very simple question: Did the conflict of interest advisory committee meet and make a recommendation or is it based simply on consulting with a single person in the Department of Justice?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the former premier would know that is the process that he would have followed with his appointments in the past as well. This is a long-standing process that occurs. He meets with a member from the Justice department, in this particular case with the Cabinet Secretariat, Mr. Speaker, in this particular case with me as Premier of the province.

Mr. Speaker, there were a number of files, not a lot, seven files that Mr. Coffey had agreed or wanted to continue on representing them. Mr. Speaker, in a timely fashion transitioned out, no

new files, no new matters for those existing clients.

Mr. Coffey was leaving a private life, coming into public service, Mr. Speaker. There was a transition time that we wanted to engage. Unfortunately, that transition time didn't fit the agendas and he issued his resignation.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

Well, maybe the Premier can explain how he knew exactly what Mr. Coffey had. The Premier talked earlier today when he met with the media that there was a list, and provided a list of all cases.

I ask the Premier: Will you table the list here in the House of Assembly and let the public judge if there are any other conflicts of interest?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

For someone who is, I think, still critic for the Department of Justice and Public Safety, Mr. Speaker, I think the Member opposite should know, when he asked that question, that there is an issue about solicitor-client privileges in our province.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at that list there is an issue about solicitor-client privilege. There's also – now whether he cares about this or not, I don't know. Obviously he doesn't care or he wouldn't have asked the question, but there must be a protection of privacy within our province, Mr. Speaker.

That list was Mr. Coffey's list. It wasn't a long list, Mr. Speaker, for someone who came from private practice into public life. There is an issue of solicitor-client privilege, Mr. Speaker. There's also an issue of privacy, and Mr. Coffey had taken many names off that list. That list was condensed, so there would have been no conflict

that would have existed with those individuals as they fell off that list.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

I ask the Premier: Without seeing the list how can the people of the province be assured that there wasn't more than seven? Are you asking people to simply just trust you, Premier, on this?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I'd like to ask the former premier one simple question: Does he believe in solicitor-client privilege? Does he believe in that, because that is a fundamental concept of our justice system? Does he believe in protecting the privacy of individuals, Mr. Speaker?

This was a relationship between the former clerk who was a private lawyer at the time, Mr. Speaker. This was a list; no more additions to the list, no more new files, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure the former premier, in his capacity today as an MHA in this House, must understand the issues around solicitor-client privileges, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

I can tell the Premier what I understand. I understand that he allowed a blatant conflict of interest to occur on his watch (inaudible) the province.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. P. DAVIS:** He allowed to let it happen, Mr. Speaker, the highest public servant in the province and the most blatant conflict of interest

that this province as ever seen before. Mr. Coffey has sued Nalcor. He's suing Western Health. We also know that he has done work for the Law Society.

I ask the Premier: Can he say that Mr. Coffey did not handle any files in government related to any of those departments?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I want to address the files that the Member opposite just mentioned – one about Nalcor, and I explained this morning when we did our press conference, Mr. Speaker. The issue around Nalcor – there was an employee that worked at Nalcor that felt he was wrongfully dismissed. There's a limitation period for that individual to act upon that wrongful dismissal. It's a two-year limitation period.

What Mr. Coffey did for that individual was merely pursue and give that client the opportunity to actually pursue the wrongful dismissal. He made it quite clear to the client that he would not be the lawyer that would be representing him. That has never been served with Nalcor. We don't know where that will go, but what we do know is that Mr. Coffey had made a commitment that he would not represent that particular person.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

We know that the Department of Natural Resources, the Department of Health, the Department of Justice have been impacted by the Premier's secret arrangement.

What protections were put in place to protect the public interest in these departments?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, the conflict walls that were put in place that I just discussed earlier, there was a meeting with a member from the Department of Justice who clearly outlined the way information would flow through the Cabinet Secretariat; and the areas that there would have been some issues that could arise, he met with Mr. Coffey, met with the appropriate deputy minister at the time. Keep in mind that any conflict of interest, the onus is on the individual to actually declare that conflict, Mr. Speaker. In this particular case, there was no conflict that was declared.

Again, back to the Nalcor issue which they seemed to actually draw a big focus on, I just said that a statement of claim was put in place to allow the client the opportunity to pursue a wrongful dismissal, and Mr. Coffey had agreed that he would not be the lawyer on record to pursue that.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

The Premier says it would be a breach of solicitor-client privilege to share the names, yet the Premier has that information available to him. I wonder if that's a breach of the solicitor-client privilege.

The Premier said this morning that he became aware of the Nalcor lawsuit through the media. Mr. Coffey is on record of telling the media that government was aware of all cases.

Premier, which statement is correct?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, two different situations, Mr. Speaker. We were aware of the issue with Nalcor back in September of last year. That was one of the issues and claims and files that were mentioned,

of the number that I just mentioned a few minutes ago.

With the Nalcor piece, as I said, there was an employee that dismissed from Nalcor, two-year timeframe for that employee to act upon the wrongful dismissal. Mr. Coffey, at this particular point, filed a statement of claim. That's it; it just sits there, Mr. Speaker, in the courts. It has not been served; no action taken on that statement of claim.

Mr. Speaker, I said this morning when I did the press conference that, yes, under section 11, I should have been notified. I would have been notified in writing on any particular area that could have been a potential conflict. When I asked Mr. Coffey about that he had the answer, what I just mentioned there about this particular individual and felt that there was no conflict of interest.

**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.

I remind the Premier if Mr. Coffey wasn't in the job in the first place, this would never have happened.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Mr. Speaker, the Premier has stated to *The Telegram* that proper measures were taken to address any potential overlap. The Premier today has talked about conflict of interest or conflict walls that have been put in place.

So I ask the Premier: Will you publicly provide the details of what measures were put in place with these walls to ensure and protect the public?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, number one, the contract's been out there, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Coffey had a meeting with the Cabinet Secretariat. He also met, as I just mentioned, with the appropriate deputy minister where there could have been, if indeed a conflict should arise.

Mr. Speaker, as I said so many times now, the issue around conflict of interest – and we find it, I would suggest, in this House all the time. If there is ever an issue, we expect that any sitting Member here would actually recuse himself of that debate.

I'm sure that in his past experience, Mr. Speaker, the former premier, who was a minister, too, in some Cabinet – I would suggest that there were times that in the debate around Cabinet table or within caucus or wherever it might have been, that he would have found there would have been times when he would have had to recuse himself.

Mr. Speaker, I would think that maybe if there was ever a discussion in Cabinet about, let's say, RNC pensions and so on, that maybe that's not an issue that he would feel that he should engage himself in.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

Mr. Speaker, the Premier is saying that – what I believe I heard him say today is the contract was the extent of the conflict walls that he had put in place. Mr. Coffey stated that he had erected what he called, Chinese walls. The Premier has talked about conflict walls; now he's saying that it was his contract.

So, Premier, are you saying that the contract was the entirety of the conflict walls? What I've asked you to do, would you make public those walls that you say were erected?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'll only be very pleased to answer that question through your Chair, Mr. Speaker. As I said earlier, there were a number of things that would have happened. First of all, he met with the appropriate deputy ministers to give them an update or explain to them what any potential issue could have been. He also met with the Cabinet Secretariat, Mr. Speaker. I had met with him too. Those conflict walls were put in place, the Chinese walls as he just mentioned. Not unusual at all in this particular circumstance.

But, Mr. Speaker, let's not forget, this was meant to be a transition out. There were no new files, no new clients, no new matters, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Coffey had been advancing that, reducing that client list. Unfortunately, he's loyal to his clients in this particular case and we just could not get to where we would need to be within a reasonable transition time.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

He should have been loyal to the people of the province before loyal to anyone else, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Mr. Speaker, the Premier says – when I asked him what those conflict walls contain – he met with deputy ministers, he met with Cabinet Secretariat, he met with the Premier and those walls were put in place. That was the words the Premier just said.

What walls were put in place, Premier?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** First of all, Mr. Speaker, I think when you look at the loyalty of an individual like Bern Coffey and the work that he's done to many cancer survivors, I would

suggest, Mr. Speaker, it's tough to question the loyalty to the people of this province.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**PREMIER BALL:** Mr. Speaker, as I said, those conflict walls were put in place. He met with his staff in the Cabinet Secretariat. He met with the DM whose department that would have been involved in some of those potential conflicts. This is the criteria that was put in place, Mr. Speaker.

As well, to put some belts and braces on it, Mr. Speaker, in section 10 and 11 of the employment contract, in particular in section 11, you will see that Mr. Coffey would have been asked to report any progress in writing of any potential conflict.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I ask the Minister of Justice: When were you made aware of the secret arrangement with Mr. Coffey?

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

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

I can confirm that there's no secret arrangement that I'm aware of.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** Mr. Speaker, this morning the Premier indicated that all his Cabinet weren't aware of it. So it's a secret to them I guess in some respects, if you want to talk about secret agreements.

I'll ask the minister: When did you become aware of the agreement?

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

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

I was made aware of this through the Department of Justice back at the time of the hiring. As has been stated here, the Department of Justice would have had a solicitor that met with Mr. Coffey to discuss his files coming in and going through the transition. So that's when I would have been made aware.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** Mr. Speaker, this morning the Premier alluded to an opinion from Justice in regard to the ethics and meeting the conflict of interest guidelines.

I ask the minister: Can we see a copy of that opinion?

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

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

I think the Member opposite should know full well that an opinion of that nature would be solicitor-client privilege. The questions that are being asked here by the Members opposite today demonstrate that they – I think they are aware but they certainly don't care about solicitor-client privilege, but it is something that I certainly understand and appreciate the importance of.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member doesn't need to hide behind solicitor-client privilege. It's up to him whether he wants to release the information or not.

Does the Minister of Justice believe that the arrangement made, in light of the conflict of

interest law, that it was appropriate that the Premier had made this arrangement with this individual? As the Attorney General and Minister of Justice, do you believe it was appropriate?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

The fact is when Mr. Coffey was hired, he immediately notified the Department of Justice. He notified the Premier. He notified Cabinet Secretariat. The fact is he was a practicing lawyer. As someone who practiced before they got into politics, I understand how transitions work. Certainly, I had a transition period myself. It took me a significant period of time to get rid of my files.

Because he identified that right away, there was a meeting with the solicitor in the Department of Justice to make aware of the cases that were there and the plans to make sure that the transition period could happen. As the Premier has said here today, that transition period has taken some time, but there was advice given on things such as conflict walls.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, if you shouldn't be put in the job, there's no need for transition, and that's the point here today we're trying to make.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education was out publicly defending this scandal on Friday. He stated: The opinion we have internally is that there is no conflict of interest.

I ask the Minister of Education: When did you find out about this secret deal that the Premier had arranged?

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

**MR. KIRBY:** Mr. Speaker, I'm not aware of any secret deal. I think that's been clarified by the Premier and the Minister of Justice here today.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Education: When did you become aware of the arrangement that was made by the minister with Mr. Coffey?

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

**MR. KIRBY:** Mr. Speaker, I became aware of the current story that's in the news through the news last week. I'm not aware of any secret deal or whatever it is the Opposition is trying to cook up here on the floor of the House of Assembly today. It is absolutely bizarre.

They pretty well pointed out they have absolutely no respect for solicitor-client privilege or the privacy of the now former clerk. I think it's absolutely outrageous. They should be ashamed of themselves.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

So the hon. minister on Friday had an opinion in regard to what information they had received on the actual conflict of interest.

Is he saying he wasn't aware that there was a conflict of interest or he hadn't gotten an opinion on it and he just found out in the media? So Cabinet didn't know.

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

**MR. KIRBY:** As I said a moment ago, Mr. Speaker, the Member should be absolutely ashamed of himself up here throwing around mud, dirt, innuendo, making things up here on the fly of the House of Assembly. He absolutely has no idea what he's talking about, is absolutely disregarding all of the answers that the Premier and the Minister of Justice have given him here on the floor of the House of Assembly.

It's obvious to me here today that he has absolutely no interest in what the answers are. In any case, he'll continue to make this up on the fly, as he has been since Friday.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** I say to the minister: I'll put my record as minister up against his any time in his 17 or 18 months (inaudible), I guarantee him that.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** Any time.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** The Premier cannot demonstrate why Stan Marshall was not in a conflict of interest as CEO of Nalcor.

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

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** Now the Premier stands by Mr. Coffey and does not feel he was in a conflict.

Will you immediately appoint an ethics commissioner to look into all appointments and hires made under your administration, to date?

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm guessing that the House Leader – if you had to put someone to deal appointments by the former administration, we would have needed commissioners the number of times that they were actually making political appointments.

Mr. Speaker, we have put in place one of the best Independent Appointments Commission that exists anywhere in this country right now – anywhere in this country. The Independent Appointments Commission is put in place; they're doing a great job. We're getting Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that never ever thought they would have an opportunity to sit on boards.

Mr. Speaker, we're getting people right now that are stepping up. We have a new chair of Nalcor. There are people that are getting involved on a daily basis through the Independent Appointments Commission. They're doing a good job and we'll continue to use the Independent Appointments Commission.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Opposition Leader for a quick question, no preamble.

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Mr. Speaker, the people of the province are outraged by what they are seeing here. The Premier has kept this from the people of the province; they've kept it secret from the Cabinet and the caucus. No one knows about it –

**MR. SPEAKER:** I ask the Member to get to his question.

**MR. P. DAVIS:** This is another example of complete incompetence by the Premier.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. P. DAVIS:** I ask the Premier, Mr. Speaker –

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

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

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!



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

The Premier told media today he believed it was fine for the most senior public servant to continue suing government until June 30, that he thought it was all right not to inform his Cabinet of the ongoing potential conflicts, and that he would do it all over again.

I ask the Premier: In light of this egregious lack of due diligence, will he resign?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have no intention of resigning.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**PREMIER BALL:** At some point, we might figure out who the real Leader of the NDP is, Mr. Speaker. When we talk about conflicts, I have to remind the Member who just answered that question that she was the individual that stood up in the Management Commission and voted for her own raise – her own raise – in the Management Commission; made sure that she put more money in her own pocket.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**PREMIER BALL:** More money in her own pocket.

So, Mr. Speaker, no, I have no intentions of resigning. When I made the comment this morning about hiring Mr. Coffey, yes, if I had to do that over again, given the information that I had at the time, we would have done it.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** I ask for the co-operation of all Members.

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

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

I point out to the Premier that what we are questioning him about today here is his behaviour as the Premier of this province. And believe me, what I've heard on the streets during this weekend, people are not pleased with his behaviour.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MS. MICHAEL:** So I ask the Premier: Why was Cabinet not informed that Mr. Coffey would be acting as a lawyer against Nalcor and Western Health, while also acting as clerk of the Executive Council?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, one more time I'll repeat the issue around Nalcor. There was an individual that was dismissed from Nalcor a couple of years ago. There's a timeline for that individual, that client who was a client of Mr. Coffey's, to actually put in place the appropriate measures that they could actually, at some particular point in time, not with Mr. Coffey as their solicitor – so what Mr. Coffey did in April of this year was pursue and give that client the opportunity to pursue a wrongful dismissal charge.

Mr. Speaker, that has not been served. I asked Mr. Coffey about that on the weekend. That has not been served to Nalcor. At some particular point in time and history the client might decide to do that but from now, as we know right now, there is no action being taken and Mr. Coffey would not be the solicitor for that client. That's what I was told this weekend.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MS. ROGERS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If the Premier was satisfied that all safeguards were put in place and Mr. Coffey's cases posed no conflict of interest, why is Mr. Coffey now resigning?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, I'll answer that question one more time, Mr. Speaker. What happened when this all started back in September of 2016, Mr. Coffey was working towards actually transitioning out of a law practice. He made a commitment that there would be no new files; there would be no new matters. For those existing clients, Mr. Speaker, there were a small number of clients that he was working with to transition his way out of his law practice. He was the sole proprietor within his law practice, so he was transitioning out.

Unfortunately, what happened was we could not agree on what the acceptable timeline would be. Mr. Coffey made a decision that he would return to private life and, I guess, do what he's going to do in his next step in private life.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MS. ROGERS:** Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier: Are there any other special arrangements for Liberal appointments to senior government positions that government has not yet revealed to the people?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There never were any special arrangements, Mr. Speaker. There were no secret arrangements. We just outlined that. The employment contract for Mr. Coffey is out there. So when the Member opposite talks about special arrangements or secret arrangements, there are none of those. I have no idea – she might be used to putting special arrangements in place within her own party.

Mr. Speaker, the contract agreement is out there right now. That is out there publicly. We just ran out of time with his transition period and the resignation was tendered and accepted yesterday.

**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 Opposition House Leader.

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I give notice that the private Member's motion that was tabled on April 10, 2017 will be the private Member's motion that we will have here in the House on Wednesday.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

### **Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given**

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

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

Mr. Speaker, Members opposite have tabled a number of questions and I'd like to take the opportunity to provide the answers to those this afternoon.

On April 5, a Member opposite tabled the following question in the House in relation to the proposed long-term care and acute care hospital in Corner Brook: What is the full value for money assessments conducted by government by EY? Mr. Speaker, the full results of the value for money assessment will be provided when a successful proponent has been identified. This is consistent with practices in other jurisdictions so as not to influence the bids from potential proponents. I table the document for the Member opposite for her information.

Mr. Speaker, on April 5, also the Member opposite asked a question around the long-term care and acute care hospital in Corner Brook: What are the specific risk assessments applied to the various procurement options? Information regarding risk assessments will be provided as part of the full value for money assessment when a successful proponent has been identified. This is consistent with practices in other jurisdictions so as not to influence the bids of potential proponents.

I might add that the answers to those questions were also shared with the representatives of CUPE when the minister responsible for Transportation and Works and I met with him several weeks ago.

Mr. Speaker, as well, on April 5 the Member opposite tabled the following question, again, related to the long-term care and acute care hospital in Corner Brook around what are the financial rates that are assumed with respect to each procurement option.

Information regarding financial interest rates will be provided as part of the full value-for-money assessment when a successful proponent has been identified. And this is consistent with the practices of other jurisdictions so as not to influence the bids from potential proponents.

Mr. Speaker, also on April 5 the Member opposite tabled the following question in the House in relationship to the proposed long-term care and acute care hospital in Corner Brook: What are the transaction costs, legal and accounting, associated with each procurement option?

Mr. Speaker, the current contract with EY, which advised and led us through the procurement process for the long-term care facility, is \$450,000. And the services of EY for the value-for-money analysis for the long-term care project and acute care hospital cost is \$400,000. The province is also retaining the services of a legal advisor and a fairness advisor for the long-term care project and the cost of these services will be provided when a successful proponent has been identified. The province is in the process of retaining these services for the acute care hospital and the costs will be provided when a successful proponent

has been identified. I'd offer these questions for the Member opposition.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, I have a number of questions from the House Leader on the opposite side that I'd like to provide the answers with today. On March 7 the Member opposite tabled the following question in the House: What is the number of temporary hires or 13 weekers for each month of the last 12 months as organized by department? And I'd like to table the document with the answer on that today.

Mr. Speaker, also on March 7 the Member opposite tabled the following question in the House: What is the number of temporary hires who have been extended beyond their original tenure by month for each of the last 12 months? And at this time I table the following document in response.

Mr. Speaker, on March 9 the Member opposite also tabled a question to the House: What is the profile of the reduction of the 450 full-time employees as announced in *Budget 2016* and as promised in Question Period by the minister on November 17, 2016? Mr. Speaker, I table the information there for the Member opposite.

In addition, there was a question from the Member opposite related to the total amount of provincial revenue generated in this fiscal year '16-'17 to date from personal income tax. Mr. Speaker, personal income tax for '16-'17 cash revenue to the end of February 2017 – I have the number here and I'll provide that to the Member opposite. It's important to note that this figure is the cash revenue only as recorded in the government's account Oracle financial system, and excludes any provincial administered credits that are charged against personal income tax. The difference in cash revenue would be a result of any changes to the tax system and changes in the tax file are based, as well as changes in the individual taxpayer circumstances, as well as any prior period adjustments.

In addition, for personal income tax for '15-'16 cash revenue to the end of February 2016 is also provided on the document that I will provide the Member opposite today. I'd ask please note that these figures again are cash revenue only as recorded by the government's accounting Oracle financial system and exclude any provincial

administered credits that are charged against personal income tax. I'll provide that answer to the Member opposite.

Mr. Speaker, the Member opposite also asked a question with regard to the provincial revenue generated in fiscal '16-'17 from the gasoline tax, and if up-to-date information wasn't available, could I please provide the most recent information.

Mr. Speaker, the gasoline tax cash revenue, as of the end of February 2017, is \$274,183,321. It is important to note that this figure is cash revenue only as recorded in government's accounts Oracle financial system and excludes any provincial administered rebates that are charged against gasoline. The differences in cash revenue would be a result of any changes to the tax system rates, changes in the consumer tax base, as well as changes in consumption.

In addition, gasoline tax '15-'16 cash revenue to the end of February 2016 was \$180,796,682. Please note that this figure is cash revenue only as recorded by government's accounts Oracle financial system and excludes any provincial administered rebates that are charged against the gasoline tax. I'll be happy to provide the Member opposite with that detail as well.

Almost done, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, on March 15 the Member opposite asked the following question about provincial revenue generated from corporate income tax.

Mr. Speaker, corporate income tax for '16-'17 cash revenue to the end of February was \$222,288,268. It is important to note that this figure is cash revenue only as recorded in government's accounts Oracle financial system and excludes any provincial administered rebates that are charged against corporate income tax. I'll provide the rest of the answer in the document when I share it with him in a moment, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, also the Member opposite tabled a question: What is the total number of revenue generated for this fiscal year from revenue actions contained in *Budget 2016* and if up-to-date data was not available, please provide the most recent total.

Mr. Speaker, there is no straight answer to this. Some streams may be available such as the tax on insurance premiums; however, the change in year-over-year revenue cannot be isolated to any single action. Multiple things would influence the change in revenue.

Personal income tax for example. Revenue would have changed due to the rate changes, individual changes in personal income, individual changes in personal circumstances and deductions, and individuals leaving the tax base, for example, moving out of the province or if an individual had become deceased during the calendar or fiscal year, individuals entering the tax base or moving into the province.

Mr. Speaker, if the Member opposite would like to provide – if you would like more information on that, I can certainly make officials available to provide him with even more detail.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

Petitions.

### Petitions

**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 the Adult Dental Program coverage for clients of the Newfoundland and Labrador provincial drug program under the Access and 65Plus Plans were eliminated in *Budget 2016*; and

WHEREAS many low-income individuals and families can no longer access basic dental care; and

WHEREAS those same individuals can now no longer access dentures;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to reinstate the Adult Dental Program to cover low-income individuals and families to better ensure oral health, quality of life and dignity.

And as in duty bound your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I've spoken to this issue pre-budget and I was hopeful and optimistic that this issue would be addressed somehow during *Budget 2017*. The cuts that were made in *Budget 2016* were disastrous. They had a particularly harsh impact on low-income families, on seniors, on some of the individuals that were accessing the Adult Dental Program through the Access and 65Plus Plans.

That program was one that was created under the previous administration, and the Liberal Opposition often called for improvements and expansion to that program. So we were quite surprised to see the program wiped out in 2016. We're hopeful that considering the impact it had on people's lives that we'd see some change in 2017, but we did not.

We saw a budget in 2016 with 300 new taxes and fees and only one of those partially adjusted in the 2017 budget. So we've got 299 new taxes and fees, some of which have only come into effect in recent months. None of that was fixed through *Budget 2017*.

Vital social programs, like the Adult Dental Program, were cut in 2016 and there was nothing done to address that in 2017. So that's a major concern. It's a major concern for, particularly, seniors.

We have seniors that are also dealing with increased costs for home care. Home care hours were cut over the past year and there were no improvements in that area in this recent budget. There were cuts to the Prescription Drug Program that affects seniors and low-income individuals. There was a reduction in diabetic test strips that are available to individuals living with diabetes in our province.

People are facing an increased cost of living on top of all of that as a result of all those new taxes and fees. This is really unfortunate. It's irresponsible to see this kind of cut in health care. The Adult Dental Program should be restored to support those that are in need of care and in need of support.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. HUTCHINGS:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm pleased to rise today to present this petition on behalf of a large group in my district.

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 public recruitment is ongoing at Mistaken Point UNESCO World Heritage Site; and

WHEREAS the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has undertaken support to commitments made in the nomination documents of the World Heritage Committee;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to immediately restrict the public recruitment process for Mistaken Point UNESCO World Heritage Site to qualified people from the local area so that people from the area are carefully and thoughtfully vetted for the position in an open, fair and transparent process.

Mr. Speaker, I've spoken before here in this House in regard to Mistaken Point and the tremendous opportunity it gives to the Southern Avalon and all of Newfoundland and Labrador in, I believe to be, our fourth UNESCO World Heritage Site designation, and what that means, as I said, for the province as a whole, and I believe it's the 18th in Canada. It looks to bring tremendous opportunity to the region, but also a structured and formal approach to ensure that

these fossils, 500 to 600 million years aged, are protected and preserved.

Out of the dossier that was submitted in regard to getting World Heritage status, one of the requirements, or one of the things supported was that a benefit would accrue to the local community and regions. Certainly, one of those benefits would be that those who are qualified have a good understanding of the cultural, academic and technical experience of that site would be able to qualify for positions in the area; and, in so doing, they would live in the community and support this site going forward and what it brings to the area.

So this evolved from the community, from the region, several hundred names, I believe, here in total. There was some concern – I've addressed it with the minister in regard to how the process was going. I think immediately the process for four new positions went public rather than internally and locally to the region, I understand, which is allowed under the current legislation and current process in place. Certainly there are huge concerns with the region that we're not exercising the great opportunities and possibilities for the people in the region.

I know of some myself who have worked there over the summer. Some have gone off and got various degrees from different universities, and from all we hear are certainly well-suited to fill these positions. We just want to ensure that government and the minister recognizes this and makes sure every opportunity and every benefit we can ensure is vetted with the community and with the people in the region is maximized, because that's what it's all about, and asking the minister to take a look at this to make sure every possibility, as I said, for employment and benefit to the region is secured, because this is something on the Southern Avalon that's important to the region, certainly important to the people here, and it's a great economic development and sustainability, and bodes well for the future. I'm asking them to take a real look at this and make sure it's done properly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**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 percent to 15 percent; and

WHEREAS an increase in the tax on books will reduce book sales to the detriment of local bookstores, 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.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the words, the prayers in this petition really say it all. It talks about the extra burden now on book publishers, on book sellers, on authors. It talks about the very odd decision of this government, in trying to raise revenue, to do it on books. When we know that books are a necessity, and we know that any investment in education, any investment at all in education is good for our economy, for the current economy and for the future economy of the province. So it's odd.

What kind of thinking went into developing this tax? Who thought that this was a smart move? It's hard to conceive of that, Mr. Speaker. It's

hard to conceive of who actually sat down and said: You know what we can do? We can tax books. We can make sure it's harder for our students to pay for books. We can make sure it's harder for seniors to buy books. We can make sure it's harder for our book publishers to sell books in the province; our own writers.

We can make it harder for our own people, the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, to buy books by our own authors. Who would have sat down and thought that was a good idea? Who would have sat down and really thought of the ramifications of such a decision? Really, what are the benefits?

My colleague here from Bell Island responded to my question, my rhetorical question of: Who? Who would have thought that this was a good idea? He said the Liberals. Well, that's exactly who thought of this and who didn't think it all the way through in terms of what are the roll-out effects? What are the ramifications of making it more difficult for people to have books?

We've heard of students whose cost for their books at university-level courses, that in one semester the extra money they pay is in excess of \$100 just on taxes on the books they need for their semester; some of them way in excess of \$100. Who could have conceivably thought that this was a good idea? And what are the benefits to the province? I can't imagine that in the scheme of things the economic benefit really is a benefit at all to this province.

We can very clearly see how this kind of tax is detrimental to our own people, to our students, to our booksellers, to our publishers and to our authors. This is not a win-win situation; this is a lose-lose situation. Again, Mr. Speaker, at what point did no one stop and say: This is not the route to go. This is lazy, lazy, ill-informed policy. There's no other way to frame it.

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 there's been an identified lack of mental health services in our province's K to 12 school system; and

WHEREAS the lack is having a significant impact on both students and teachers; and

WHEREAS left unchecked, matters can and, in many cases, will develop into more serious issues;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to increase mental health services and programs in our province's K to 12 school system.

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

Mr. Speaker, I've had the opportunity to present this and every time I present it, there are obviously some viewers out there or there are people who pass on the message, or there's another petition that comes in that acknowledges the challenges within our school system, and the importance of having programs and services to address the particular needs that young people and our student population are facing in the education system around mental health.

We know society has changed dramatically over the last number of years and there's a multitude of challenges within the education system. But within society, as young people grow up, and to identify and support mental health issues is the key component to ensure that our students have the ability to be successful through our school system, and then move on to post-secondary and to whatever other process they use in their adult lives to be able to be contributing members of society and be able to have the best quality of life as possible.

Mr. Speaker, as we look at it, we know there's a multitude of programs and services that we've improved in our school system over the years, but we still are lacking a better approach to mental health and better preventative and identifying processes in advance.

We went through Estimates this morning for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and while there's no doubt great work being done by educators and great work being done by our school administrators, there are still challenges that they face because they don't have the resources. They don't have the lead coming from the department to foster that.

They don't have somebody organizing or developing partnerships with the private sector and the not-for-profit sector who have a speciality in this area, who have an ability to identify how we implement programs and services; how we best serve them; how we use technology go get services out there; how we use the medical profession to be able to identify early signs of mental health issues; how we use the existing volunteer sector and peer counselling within our own school systems, older students supporting and counselling younger students, students who are on the same class (inaudible), processes around empathy and supportive mechanisms there.

So, Mr. Speaker, it's an identified issue here. We had a great committee, an All-Party Committee that identified a multitude of challenges within the mental health community because they listened to those people who were facing it, they listened to the professionals who have a skill set, they listened to those who have done the research, and they looked at how things are being addressed in other areas and some of the positive things that have happened and some of the challenges that they've had and have come up with a set of recommendations to be implemented. In that, are a set of recommendations about how we address early identification of mental health issues, and particularly around students and how we foster that in the school system and how we support that.

So we need to not only take what the committee has identified and put that as a recommendation, but we also have to take into play what our own educators and our own society said.

Mr. Speaker, I want to present this and I'll have a chance to speak to it again.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Orders of the Day, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Orders of the Day.

### Orders of the Day

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 1, budget.

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

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

I am looking forward today to speaking to the budget following the non-confidence vote that was moved by the Official Opposition. I'm happy to stand to speak to it, because we continually need to set the record straight with this government. The people need to hear what the real situations are. It's something that this government is not very good at, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Finance stood in this House and presented a Budget Speech which was a rosy picture of the reality of this province; a rosy picture that claimed we were stable; a rosy picture that said everything was going well. It's like we had two different worlds being presented to the people of the province – the majority of whom heard about the Budget Speech, some would have watched it, they would have seen reports in the paper, but at the same time there's more to the budget than a Budget Speech. You also have a load of documents which give the real figures, which give the real details, which really tell us what the economic picture of the province is.

There's even a budget document, *Budget 2017*, that's called *The Economy*. You have the budget document the *Estimates* book, which is a very, very thick book. That book takes every department of government, department by department, and goes through their budget, goes



through what was spent in the previous year, goes through what the government said was going to be spent and what changes were made.

Then after the budget, the budget came out for 2017-2018, we are now going through what's called Estimates. At Estimates, we get to sit down in committees with the minister and key people in a department and question the government on the Estimates. We go through it line by line. If we see anomalies from the year before coming into this year, we ask about those anomalies. We get explanations, and they are very good meetings, Mr. Speaker.

I have to say that I always find that the staff of the department and the ministers are forthcoming. We get their briefing notes when the meetings are over. They answer our questions. Sometimes we may be happy with the answers. If not, we get to question more and we can ask questions here in the House of Assembly. But the average citizen, the average person, is not sitting down and going through the thick document called *Estimates*. The average person is not going to the book that's called *The Economy*, for many reasons, Mr. Speaker.

One, the average person out there is very busy. They are people who are trying to make a living. They are people with families and responsibilities. To go online, because that's what they would have to do, open up these documents and start reading them is something that I think is very time consuming, number one, and it is a demand on people that's very, very difficult.

What I think government has a responsibility to do is to paint the correct picture when the Minister of Finance gives the Budget Speech, not correct a picture that only gives part of the story. Not correct a picture that ignores the reality of people's lives, but something that really speaks to the full reality.

In the Budget Speech, the minister, supported by the Premier in comments afterwards, did their best to obscure the bad news, what the reality is in our province right now. They hoped, I guess, that if it came out in dribs and drabs, a bit of information here, a bit of information there, that

people wouldn't put it all together and figure out what was really going on in the province.

So I want to speak to some of the things that are in the documents, that are in what the budget is all about, not the rosy speech that was given by the minister. What are some of the facts that are in the book that is called *The Economy*? Well, in that book that's called *The Economy*, there is a page about the economic indicators in our province right now and those economic indicators are very, very serious. There are nine in particular.

So you have one: the real household income. The real household income in this province since the last budget is down 3.2 per cent – down, real household income. And no wonder, based on the budget of 2016-2017 which laid such a burden on the shoulders of the people of this province with new taxes, new fees, new fines. Whichever way this government could try to pull money out of the pockets of ordinary people in the province, they did it. So no wonder the real household income is down.

Retail sales; that shows people's spending power. As consumers, what are they doing out there? Are they spending more money? Are they going out to eat? Are they going to movies or other cultural events? Well, retail sales are down 3 per cent. It goes along with the real household income down 3.2 per cent. A little bit of a correlation there.

Then you have housing starts. We all know that's also a sign of a booming economy when housing starts are going up. When people feel they can take on building a new home; that they can take on, especially younger people moving ahead, looking at having families and looking at settling down together and creating families together. Housing starts, Mr. Speaker, are down 3.4 per cent; real correlations here.

Then the real GDP, the real gross domestic product, which is that by which we judge how the overall economy is making out, that's down; down by 3.8 per cent.

Then you have the real final domestic demand. What is it that people are looking for? What is it that people can seek? What is the demand of the

person out there, the consumers out there? The demand is down 4.1 per cent.

Capital investment, people who do have money and who invest in capital infrastructure, invest in creating capital projects, et cetera. Capital investment is down 9.1 per cent. The only indicators, Mr. Speaker, that are up is the cost of living has gone up and the unemployment rate has gone up.

So what we have here – and this has been definitely stated by economists. What we have here are documents that show that our economy in this province is in a recession, and economists agree to that. You would never know from the Budget Speech that was presented here in this House in April that we were in a recession. No mention of that to the people of this province.

We tried to get the minister after the budget was read in the House; we tried to get her to confirm these numbers on the record. Unfortunately, the minister got defensive, she got indignant. She suggested it was fear mongering for us to point out to the public what the real message was in the budget documents. That it was fear mongering for us to do our job as an Opposition party and question them on the real issues. That it was fear mongering for us as an Opposition party to raise those questions during Question Period.

Well, I find it absolutely unacceptable and disgraceful that the Minister of Finance would call our questioning fear mongering, when what we're doing is asking her how do these figures, which are in her document, which show how badly our economy is, how do those figures balance out with what she gave as the Budget Speech in this House, which is what the majority of the public know. They don't know all these details. So if government is not going to do its responsibility and point out the real story, if government is not going to do its responsibility and point out what the real economic reality is, then I think we have the responsibility as an Opposition party to do that.

So it's not fear mongering, Mr. Speaker. It's trying to get government to acknowledge the reality so that people can say to them, what is your plan? How are you going to get us out of this? What they have in their budget is not going

to get us out of a recession. Again, that's something that economists agree to.

What this government didn't want people to realize – I've heard people say: oh, wow, it wasn't as bad as I thought. That's what this government was trying to do, to get people to think that way, but what people are starting to realize is that the 2017 budget is basically the 2016 budget. We still have a tax on our books.

Our post-secondary students, since last year, are spending hundreds of dollars on books just in tax. That is absolutely unacceptable. We have low-income people, ordinary income people every time they go and try to buy a book having to pay tax. It is unbelievable in a province that has the lowest literacy level in the country that we have books that are taxed. That tax remains. They put it on in 2016. Did they take it off? No they didn't. It's still there.

The levy remains. That extra tax remains. They made some changes to it to decrease slightly the number of people who are being charged a levy, but the majority are still charged and the levy still remains, Mr. Speaker.

The provincial tax on insurance; I've had many people talk to me about the tax on insurance. They are finding it difficult. That tax remains.

All kinds of the fees remain. The 300 fee increases; 300 fee increases that deal with just ordinary life. That deal with getting your car registered; that deal with your driver's licence; that deal with your moose licence. I mean 300 fees were increased and those increases remain.

We still don't know what the government is going to do about libraries. That was in last year's budget, and this year they're waiting on a report. This year's budget hasn't closed the libraries but we still don't know what is going to happen.

One of the things the Minister of Finance put forward was that things were much better than we thought they were going to be because we had an increase in revenue. Look at that increase in revenue, Mr. Speaker. Where did that increase in revenue come from? That increase in revenue came from oil production and an increase in the price of a barrel of oil.

Now that's rather frightening, that we have a better budget in terms of revenue than the government thought because something they have no control over improved. They have no plan for the future to try to make sure that they have revenue that they have some control over, to make sure that we're not every year going to be dictated to and controlled by the price of oil.

Yes, there was a reduction in the deficit and, yes, they reduced the gas tax they put on last year. They didn't remove it but reduced it. How were they able to do that? Simply because the price of a barrel of oil went up higher than they anticipated and because there was more oil production than they anticipated.

Something I want to point out, which government has been a bit rosy about as well, wearing rose-tinted glasses, is the fact that they are basing this year's budget, 2017-18, on getting revenues based on \$56 US a barrel for oil. Now, I know they have in their document, in the book called *The Economy*, some of the projections that are out there by the professional groups but, so far, those projections are off because right now I think it's \$51. So what are we going to find next year? This year it was a bit higher than they expected and right now the signs are that the price of oil is going down.

It was only last week there was an economist, a specialist from the UK, who was on the airwaves here in the province and his judgement is it's going down to \$51, \$52 – it's there already – and it's going to stay there; it's not going up. So if that turns out to be the case, we have a very difficult situation for next year. Because if their budget, based on \$56 US a barrel, without any plan for increased revenue from any other source, if that's what happens, if that's what we have happening with oil going down and staying at around \$51 or \$52 a barrel, well then we're going to have a loss of revenue next year and we're going to have a more dire picture than what we have right now. This is what they don't want people to understand.

I don't want to make things negative for people, but people know the reality. This is what the government seems to not recognize, that people know the reality. They're living the reality. They're living with more and more money being taken out of their pockets. Life is getting harder

for them. More people are going to food banks. More students at Memorial University are going to food banks.

We have a very serious situation with a government without any plan. There is no plan in this budget. No plan for building our economy. No plan for economic diversification. They use all kinds of great language but when you look for actions, there's nothing there, and that's what's frightening.

Yes, they're going to let more Crown lands be available for agriculture, but no money to help people who are already farming or the younger farmers who want to start larger enterprises, no money to help them. They need more than just land. They need support. They need start-up. Or they need start-up, if not for a new farm, for new projects.

We have a problem with regard to food security in this province. Government mentions it in their document, but there's no vision of how they can work with the agricultural industry to take care, to start moving towards food security in this province – nothing, and that is what is so disturbing.

This government may not realize it, yet people notice that, and certainly people in the agricultural industry notice it. So we ask this government to become more realistic with people and more honest with people, because what's happening is they are ignoring the reality. They're trying to pitch this budget as being a good news budget. They appear to have convinced themselves that last year's budget was a good budget also, and the only problem was they didn't communicate the budget well enough.

Well, I got news for them; no matter how they communicate it, no matter what they did, they couldn't make that budget a good budget and be seen as a good budget by people. People are still living with that budget. They could not, by any stretch of the imagination, say to people in some form or other oh no, it's a levy, but it's not really a levy. Oh, yes, there are 300 new areas that have fees that have been increased but no, that really didn't happen. I don't know how they think they could have communicated a good budget last year, how communication could have

changed the reality. People know what was happening. What has happened now is that we are in the same situation. The mean budget last year gave no hope and now we have a leaner and meaner budget this year, and people are not happy.

They can try all they want to make it sound okay, to make it sound new, to make it sound all right, people know the difference. We're not the only ones who are saying this. The media reports portrayed the budget as a stay-the-course affair, and I agree with that description. The problem is that staying the course in this province is going to mean all of our economic indicators continuing to go downwards, everybody suffering more when it comes to trying to make ends meet. That's what staying the course is going to mean. Staying the course is going to mean higher unemployment. Staying the course is going to mean an economy that's more and more in recession. This is what they've given the people of this province.

I will have a couple of more times in the budget debate to speak, Madam Speaker, and I look forward to continuing to raise these issues.

Thank you very much.

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

**MR. LANE:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It's a pleasure to be back in the House of Assembly and to have an opportunity to speak to the budget. I guess we'll all have three opportunities at least, and this is my first one.

Madam Speaker, I just want to start off by saying that I want to keep my commentary here to try to be somewhat balanced and fair on it. I certainly have a lot of concerns, as has already been pointed out. But there have been some good things in the budget as well and I think it's important that we recognize the good and the bad.

So I will say, just to start off, that I think this whole approach of this zero-based budgeting exercise, while there are still a lot of unanswered questions – and I do thank the Minister of

Finance; she did arrange a meeting with Opposition Members and members from her department to try to answer some of those questions. Unfortunately, there are still an awful lot of questions that they weren't really in a position to answer in terms of where some of these savings are.

I think originally we had a number of \$41 million and we managed to be shown where there's \$25 million that really they couldn't account for in terms of exactly where that money would be saved. I think what we got from it is that a lot of it is ongoing, actions to come. So that would certainly lead me to believe that when we looked at, for example, the flatter, leaner management process and so on that they looked at in core government departments and then Eastern Health, well then we have agencies, boards and commissions where we haven't seen that happen. So it makes you think that perhaps that's coming and we could see some cutbacks and layoffs there, for example.

Without having that actual information given to you, it's hard to really know. So I guess when we talk about budgets and the devil being in the details, there are still a number of details which we are yet to become aware of, and I guess we will find out as time goes on.

I will say, though, that the whole concept of zero-based budgeting, I think, is a good one. I think it's a good idea to be able to say just because you spent X amount of dollars on travel last year that that automatically means you can spend the same amount this year. Perhaps you don't need to do as much travel this year as you did last year. Perhaps money that was spent on office supplies and furniture you needed last year, perhaps this year you don't need to spend as much, therefore why put the money there that would only get transferred over into other categories to be spent on other things, or to be spent because the year-end is soon going to be up – and we hear these stories about we're getting close to year-end, we better spend all the money or we won't get as much next year. So I think the whole concept of starting at the zero-based and justifying every expenditure, that part of it at least is a good idea and I do support that in principle.

There were a few other tidbits in there that I thought were good in the budget. There was some increased funding for early childhood educators; they're going to get an additional \$1 per hour. That's certainly a positive thing; something they've been looking for, for a while. I think we all agree that we need to make sure that our children are well cared for, so this goes a long ways to helping towards that.

We see an increase for the child care subsidy for families on lower incomes. Again, I would see that as a positive thing. We saw some new funding for student assistants in inclusive classrooms. That, I think, is an important thing. It is certainly something that all Opposition Members raised and have lobbied for. I'm glad to see that that did happen.

Now, I did hear commentary from the NLTA President Jim Dinn – I'm not sure if he's still the president, or if he's past president now. Anyway, there's a transition perhaps. He did make some commentary that while he was glad to see that announcement, it doesn't go anywhere close to making up for the issues that were created in *Budget 2016* when there was a number of positions and resources cut. So he did make that commentary.

I don't have the details on it. Those are his comments, not mine. I know there still continues to be issues in the classroom. But, with that said, having some additional student assistants is better than not having them, so I will point out that I'm glad to see that.

There was some new funding for transition houses there, which was a good thing. A new pilot project there to provide legal advice for victims of sexual assault – very pleased to see that pilot project. I think it was just announced about a week or so ago. I think it was primarily federal money. There may have been some provincial money that went with it, but in any regard it is welcome news. I think it's a good initiative and I was glad to see that in the budget.

There was also funding put in place for a new program for energy efficiency under Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. Again, that's a positive thing. Although I will point out that there always was a program called the Residential Energy Efficiency Program under

Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, which was very similar. That program got cancelled in last year's budget and now we've introduced a new program. Now, it could be argued that perhaps this program is somewhat enhanced because there's not just a grants program but there's a loans program as well. I think even the grant may have increased slightly. So glad to see that back and if there are some enhancements, that's a good thing. But again, you're only replacing what was removed in last year's budget.

I was also pleased to see some funding for mental health. The work of the All-Party Committee on Mental Health, I think that has led to this. I'm glad to see there's some money set aside to start working on some of the recommendations that came out of the All-Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions. I think there's some money now going towards looking at the replacement of the Waterford and so on, which again we all know that's needed. That's not the same as building the Waterford. Setting money aside to move the process forward is not the same as it actually happening.

I'm glad that they've done it – don't get me wrong – but until we actually see construction, then we've seen on lots of projects in the past, whether it be this administration or past administrations, where money would be set aside for studies and all this kind of stuff, and site reviews and all these things, and then it never happens. Or something gets announced and then it gets re-announced and re-announced, and five years later we're still announcing it, we're still studying it, but nothing ever happens.

I hope that we're serious about this, and this not just an attempt to pacify people who are advocates for mental health, to give the suggestion that we're really going to finally do something and that we actually don't. I hope that we do, and we'll certainly be following that as we move forward.

So as I said, these are some of the things, Madam Speaker, that were in the budget that I would view as positive things. Certainly I can't forget as well the gas tax reduction. I'm glad to see that it will be reduced. I don't know why we had to wait until June to reduce it. It could have been reduced immediately when the budget was

announced. Anyway, it's going to be reduced in June. I'm glad to see that happen. It think it's 10 cents and then an additional four, is it, or something like that. We're not eliminating the total 16 cents, but we're eliminating eight and four, is it – 12 cents altogether this year. So I'm glad to see that happening, for sure, but it is important to point out that really all we're doing is partially reducing something was done last year.

That kind of ties into what the Member for Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi was saying. That the reality of it is that in last year's budget, there were severe measures taken by anybody's account on behalf of the government. Now, whether that was necessary or not, that's the part that's debatable.

Government Members and Cabinet would say we actually had to do that; we had no choice. There are other people that would say that you didn't have to do any of it. I think in the middle, the reality that most people would say that I've spoken to at least, and I think my constituents would say and I would agree 100 per cent, that we absolutely had to do something last year.

Unfortunately, there had to be some increases. It was a question of degrees. It was a question of how far it went. And that was really the issue that I had with the budget, that was the issue that my constituents had, is that they felt it went too far. What you heard from so many people, the terminology was: too much too fast.

It's important to realize that, again, as the former speaker said, the budget was kind of being sold and a lot of people sort of bought into that idea, at least originally, as this is not a bad budget because we didn't tax you any more – I think the Minister of Finance or other Members might have said something to that effect.

There are no new tax increases. That's what it was. There are no new tax increases in this budget and everybody was really excited about that – there are no new tax increases. But you have to ask yourself is the reason why there's no new tax increases because there's really nothing left to tax. Because last year we introduced 300 new taxes and fees and so on and that had a severe impact on many people and that continues today.

So if this year to simply say we didn't increase it, we didn't add any more, that's not necessarily – I mean it's a good thing, obviously, but it's not really a good thing because you also didn't eliminate all the damage that was created in last year's budget. You didn't eliminate what you did last year. You can't pretend that last year didn't happen.

People realize that when they look at their paycheque. I've had many people say to me, they look at their paycheque and how much money that they paid in, it's way beyond what it ever was. And we've seen the impact that it's having on many people in the province.

Now, some people can shoulder it more than others, without a doubt. If you are somebody who is just struggling, just barely getting by, just barely making ends meet as it is, then last year's budget, and this year's continuation of that, was devastating – absolutely devastating.

There are other people that were in a position to shoulder the tax and all the increases but it has had a major impact on their lives, on their spending habits, on their expendable income and so on. Now, are they going to the food bank? No. Although we have seen an increase in food bank use, which is very important to note; an increase in food bank use. We've seen a number of businesses shut down and we've seen increased bankruptcies, people going into consumer protection and so on or creditor protection.

So there's no doubt that it has an impact but there are still a lot of people that were able to suck it up – for lack of better terminology – but their spending is down. Because of their spending being down, then what are the things you cut? There are certain things you can't cut. You have to pay your mortgage. You have to pay your car or whatever, if you have one. You have to eat. You have to have heat in your home. The kids have to go to school and they need lunch and so on. But when it comes to going out on a Friday night or a Saturday evening or something, down to The Keg or wherever you like to go, perhaps going for a couple of drinks down on George Street if that's your thing, perhaps going to a movie. All those types of things, those are the things that get cut. Those are the extras, if you will, that get cut.

There were an awful lot of people who were forced to give up all of those things and they're not happy about it. The other thing is it's not just them. It's the impact that has on those businesses. I've spoken to a number of business owners and so on in the bar and restaurant industry and other businesses who have told me they have seen a tremendous drop in sales. There's no doubt about it.

I spoke to a gentleman a couple of weeks ago; he's a member of the Home Builders' Association. He told me that housing starts are down something like 50 per cent from last year. He said it's incredible. And people who do renovations on homes, people who make a living renovating homes, their business has dropped off substantially. All it has really done – this guy told me, which makes sense – is it's fueling the underground economy.

More and more people – there were always people that would do it anyway, but more and more people are forced to get it done for cash and to get it done on the cheap; to get it done for cash. Then that sometimes sacrifices safety and everything else, but that's happening.

Like I said, there are a lot of people just not getting those repairs done on the home, just not building that new patio deck, just not building that shed, just not making that improvement to their cabin or whatever the case might be. They're just not doing it because the money isn't there. That's impacting businesses. It's impacting employment. That's why we're seeing businesses shut down. That's why we're seeing bankruptcies and all of these other things.

The Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi is right. Even in the budget document itself, when we look at the indicators that are there, we see unemployment is up. We see housing starts are down. Household income is down. All those things are down. These are things that we need for our economy to thrive and to grow and so on. That's what we're seeing.

I guess the point is, Madam Speaker, as I said, it's not about what was done in *Budget 2017*. It's about what was done in 2016 and allowed to continue on in 2017. That's what's having that impact. Like I said, there are other things as well. I don't know how many people I've had

call the office, and deal with seniors and so on, that were impacted very negatively by things like when they cut the over-the-counter prescriptions, home care.

You talk about the devil is in the details; if you read the budget last year, nowhere in the budget did it talk about we're going to cut home care hours or we're going to increase the amount that a person who receives home care is going to have to pay. We're going to increase the amount that someone who receives home care supplies is going to have to pay.

That wasn't in the budget. All of that came to light two or three months later when a letter was sent out by the various health care authorities to their clients saying your home care is up for renewal. By the way, so that you know, last year you paid X; this year you're going to pay Y. We're increasing the percentage that you have to pay towards your home care and we're reducing your hours and you're going to have to pay more for your supplies.

That wasn't in the budget. It just happened, it came out over time. And I suspect there are going to be similar things, perhaps, that may come out over time with this budget that we don't know about yet. It will come out in dribs and drabs and so on.

These are the things that are important to people. The people don't necessarily get all caught up in these big budget speeches and the big numbers and everything there. That's really not what they're focused on. They're focused on: How does this budget affect my day-to-day life? That's all that matters. The rest of it they couldn't care less. They could care less.

How does this impact my day-to-day life? Do I have to pay more taxes? Will my services be reduced? How can I live? How can I pay my bills? Are the services going to be available for me if I get sick? I have a child going to school next year, are they going to be in a safe classroom with all the resources they need, or are they going to be in an overcrowded classroom with lack of resources? Those are the things that people are concerned about and those are the details that you don't see in a budget document.

And it's hard for us and the people have said to me, you know, how about this, how about that, how about somebody else, some of these detailed issues. And my honest answer is I can't tell you. I can only tell you what is available today. I can't say to you that as a result of this budget that in two months' time that this service could be taken away or reduced. I can't say that. I don't know – I don't know. So, Madam Speaker, these are the things that matter to people and these are the things that we have to ask questions about, we have to raise concerns about and so on.

So my time is pretty much running out. I will just conclude or summarize by saying, as I did in the beginning, there were some good things in this budget and there were some things that are not good. I'm prepared to talk about the good and the bad, both. And I think we all should be open to doing just that.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** And the ugly?

**MR. LANE:** I won't say the ugly, but the good and the bad for sure.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the time.

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

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

It's certainly an honour and a privilege to rise in this hon. House once again and speak to *Budget 2017*. But I have to say that in the last two years it's certainly anything but pleasurable to speak to the budgets that are being brought down, because we're seeing the impact of these budgets is having a very negative and detrimental impact on the well-being of our Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, Madam Speaker.

Before I get into the budget, I would like to recognize all of these volunteers in our wonderful Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, last week being Volunteer Week, and I was very fortunate to be in my district and be

able to participate in some volunteer appreciation events, which were absolutely incredible, Madam Speaker, to witness.

When you're here in the House of Assembly, particularly when you're discussing the budget, you can get downhearted sometimes, but all it takes is a visit to your district, with your constituents, and you're soon re-energized again because of the great, fantastic people that you're working on behalf of out there in the districts. You know that no matter how tough it gets, the tough keep on going because, at the end of the day, we're all about making things better.

The theme of this year's volunteer week was: volunteers impact people's lives. They really genuinely, truly do. I know I've spoken about this a few times as I've got up in the House this year, but it has been quite an incredible year in the District of Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune and Coast of Bays with the unprecedented floods and fires. And it was clearly volunteers who got us through these times. We were very nervous, particularly during the floods and not knowing whether our houses were going to be still on land or overboard by the time morning came.

But, at the end of the day, it was the volunteers who put you at ease. We knew the firefighters and the first responders were out there doing everything they could to mitigate the danger that we were in, and they were there to pick up the pieces the next morning. So hats off to all of them and, again, when we had the fires, the calls came in at about 4 in the morning, by 6 o'clock we had a community of volunteers at the Lions Club cooking up breakfast for the firemen, and they stayed there and cooked for two days as the firemen fought the fires.

So incredible things like that happen all across our wonderful province because of volunteers and on behalf of myself as the MHA for the District of Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune, and all my colleagues, I say thank you to each and every volunteer in Newfoundland and Labrador.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MS. PERRY:** And this being the Budget Speech, I also want to talk a little more about my district before I actually get into details of the budget which gravely concerns me, and that is,



again, picking up the pieces from the fires that took place. I would like to thank the Minister of Education for taking the time to come to the District of Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune last week to see the school and the damage first-hand and to talk to the people and see how they were affected and talk to the children. While he was there, we also toured around some other schools in my region.

I think I'm confident in saying that the minister was quite impressed with the strength and resiliency of the people of Bay d'Espoir who have come together and who are now pursuing a new school for that portion of the district, for the Bay d'Espoir catchment area. We look forward to the coming months and years and the eventual opening of a brand new, state-of-the-art school.

So they say out of everything bad, sometimes there's always a silver lining. Our children in the Bay d'Espoir area have been operating out of schools that are 60 years old, so they're going to finally have a state-of-the-art school, which is going to be absolutely fantastic. We're going to have all the proper art supplies. We're going to have the proper music rooms. We're going to have the proper drama rooms. We're going to have the proper tech and science rooms. It's going to be absolutely fabulous and we will get there, hopefully, in the not-too-distant future, Madam Speaker.

Now I'm going to join where my colleagues have left off, the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands and the Member for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi, in terms of the budget and the impacts it has had. I have to say, last year in 2016 when I went into the budget lockdown my attitude was this: It can't possibly be as bad as they're saying. No, they've really been putting a lot of messaging into she's gone b'y, she gone. So, no, we're going in there and sit down and – they've oversold us on how bad they're going to bring it down. It's really not going to be that bad.

Well, I sat in my chair and I didn't know that I was going to be able to get up to walk into the room for *Budget 2016*, Madam Speaker. We went into shock and we stayed in shock for months: 300 new taxes, the worst of the worst of the worst that I could ever have imagined in a

million years. And we're seeing the impacts of that budget today.

We've seen our bond rating drop. It dropped shortly after the budget last year and we're paying higher interest costs as a result. We're seeing the highest unemployment that this province has seen in quite some time. We're seeing a record number of bankruptcies. People have no choice but to file for bankruptcy because the money is no longer in their pockets, Madam Speaker. The feeling of doom and gloom was permeating across this province, but I'm telling you now, I'm seeing a change in that because we, the people, believe in ourselves. We, the people, have confidence in ourselves and we are going to turn this province around. We do have strong entrepreneurs across this Island. We do have a lot to applaud and be thankful for.

The taxation measures we're under now are regressive. They're stifling the economy, they're turning us backwards and, hopefully, we're going to see some change in the direction that government has moved us in and we're going to see things start to turn around.

Again, going back to Conservative ideology when it comes to taxation, you usually lower taxation to stimulate an economy. We have increased taxation to the point that our economy is stifled and businesses are closing down at an alarming rate and, again, I say people filing for bankruptcy at an alarming rate – terrible policy decisions that have hurt this province immensely.

We're two years away from the people being able to make a decision as to what kind of a future we want going forward. In my opinion, I certainly will be looking to a future and to leaders that have optimism about our future, and believe in our potential as a people and know that we have the capability to be just as strong as anywhere else in this country or in this continent, Madam Speaker. And that's where we're going.

So what do we now know? Prior to the election of 2015 going in, we had been in government, our government, for 12 years. And you know how they talk about cycles of politics. Some

were saying, well, it's just the cycle is what it is and people are ready for a change.

We were told at that time as a people that there was a plan. Well, what do we now know two years later? We now know there was never plan. There's still no plan. We now know that the decisions that have been made have hurt the economy and in fact made things far, far, far worse than they needed to be.

Other provinces in this country and other economies that were dependent on oil rode through the oil crash far better than we did because they took a different approach in their decision making; they took a different approach in their policy direction. Even the Liberal government in Ottawa has taken a completely different approach and has gone down the road of spending to stimulate the economy.

Now, I don't condone that entirely, being a fiscal Conservative. I'm somewhat concerned about the rate of increase in spending in Ottawa, but I will say somewhere in between I do think lies the better answer. We're seeing other provinces weather this much better than we have. And hopefully the government of the day can look to the successes that the other provinces are having and implement some of those in the next budget to come, Madam Speaker.

Some of the things that I will talk about later today are those opportunities and those ideas that I think government can pursue to help put our province in a much better position than what it is today.

Oil is the resource that is indeed very valuable, but at the end of the day we need to have renewable resources that will continue to provide us with an economic base for all time. To that end, I strongly support renewal of the traditional fishery, which is really the very reason for our being.

In my former life, I worked as an executive director with the Coast of Bays Corporation, a community economic development board. We did a lot of work on fishery issues in the area. I have a lot of fishermen in my region. In fact, nearly 1,000 people were employed in the fishery down my way at one time. We had a

large number of plants. We had them in Belleoram. We had them in Gaultois. We had them in Hermitage. We had them in Harbour Breton. They all closed down actually and only one struggled through; Harbour Breton managed to struggle through, with a lot of down time. But because of the aquaculture industry today, we now have three plants back up and running in the Coast of Bays region and we anticipate more to come as the industry continues to grow.

So is there a way to turn things around? Absolutely. Is there potential for the future? Absolutely. I truly hope that we, the people, continue to remind government that there is a lot that we, the people, are capable of and can do to turn this province around, and we have to do it together, Madam Speaker. We all have to work together to achieve that, I have no doubt.

When we see things happening like what we saw this weekend with respect to the appointment of Bernard Coffey to the position of clerk and in a conflict of interest, it's very alarming. I spent the whole weekend scratching my head because a day in politics can sometimes be quite interesting. Every day when you get up, you never know what you're going to hear. This is astounding, this whole situation. The fact that a person who was known to be suing government would even be hired for a position of clerk of Executive Council is astounding. It's absolutely astounding. I'm interested in seeing what the Democracy Watch people are going to have to say and I'm certainly interested in seeing how this is rectified as we move forward.

We brought in a bill in this House, last year in 2016, Bill 1, the Independent Appointments Commission. I said what I had to say during that debate, and I'm more convinced than ever of what I said in that debate at that time. Government should not be about who's working on my campaign and who's supporting my party and who's doing this for me and who's doing that for me; it should very much be about who is the best person for the job. I believe in that entirely.

Even watching the Twitter feed today, some of the things you see, our temporary acting clerk is a person with 32 years of experience – female. Probably should have been appointed in the first place, Madam Speaker, is what I will say to that.

Just because of a person's political connections it does not necessarily make them the best person for the job. We've obviously seen that time and time again, and I fear we'll continue to see it time and time again over the next two years as we see other positions get filled by people that will in some way, shape or form – I have no doubt – have some kind of connection to the Liberal Party, barring people really standing up and saying we're tired of this, we're not going to tolerate it anymore, and Bill 1 really needs to be strengthened.

So I'm going to talk a little bit, Madam Speaker, about why I find this whole situation unsettling. Premier Ball made a special arrangement with the Mr. Coffey to continue to practise law. He's saying it wasn't a secret arrangement, but it was an arrangement that was kept secret from the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, from his caucus and from his Cabinet. The former clerk is leading a lawsuit that's suing the Crown corporation, Nalcor Energy, and Western Health, which is clearly a conflict of interest, and very inappropriate.

Premier Ball had a responsibility to come clean with the people of the province and provide an explanation of his secret arrangement that he made when the clerk was appointed. For the Premier to have reached a secret arrangement with the province's top bureaucrat to continue to practise law while collecting over \$180,000 acting as a clerk of the Executive Council is clearly inappropriate and in conflict of interest.

The fact that Mr. Coffey is lead counsel in a statement of claim against Nalcor Energy, a provincial Crown corporation, needs explanation. It's clearly a misuse of authority. Mr. Coffey has stated that government is aware of the cases. It appears that the Premier and his Liberal team support the clerk suing the provincial Crown corporation and Western Health, and on profiting on a legal case against the province.

Madam Speaker, if there are two people in this province who know more than anyone about what's happening in this province, it's the Premier and the clerk of Executive Council. They see and are aware of everything, or at least they should be.

Why would Mr. Ball make an arrangement which clearly –?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MS. PERRY:** Why would the Premier make an arrangement –?

**MR. A. PARSONS:** A point of order.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MS. PERRY:** My apologies; I withdraw.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I recognize the Government House Leader.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** I appreciate that the Member opposite is reading from a script, but they have to make sure they recognize Members by their seat or their position.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I ask the Member to withdraw the comment.

**MS. PERRY:** Yes, I will refer to the proper title, Madam Speaker.

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

**MS. PERRY:** Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I certainly will use the proper title.

So why would the Premier make an arrangement which clearly violates the impartiality of the office of the clerk and is in a clear conflict of interest? Madam Speaker, there are a lot of positions in this House that are impartial; the Speaker for one.

The position of Speaker, they have a legal duty to be non-partisan and to be fair to all parties in this hon. House of Assembly, and to treat all parties and apply the rules the same to all parties. It's something we expect of the Speaker and it's something we expect from the office of the clerk.

The clerk is a member of the Oversight Committee on Muskrat Falls. He is the top bureaucrat in the provincial government and engaged in the operations, budgets and issues related to every department within government. He provides direction and advice to the Premier.

What happened to impartial, non-partisan conduct? I will say as the person sitting in this House and as a person representing the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and a person who continues to reside in this province until I take my last breath, I certainly will call upon government on a continual basis to adhere to the rules of impartiality and non-partisanship. Where they apply, they must be honoured.

Madam Speaker, once again, the actions of the Liberal administration are appalling and they're astounding. When they should be focused and acting in the best interests of the people that they represent, they look the other way and make a decision which could have negative implications for Nalcor and on the integrity of the government. It's astounding. It's another example of the Liberals operating in a secretive, controlling culture. It was a clear conflict of interest for the clerk to be involved in a court case suing a government entity.

And here we were with a Premier who didn't have any concern. In fact, I think he said he would do it again. It's mind boggling, Madam Speaker, and I'm glad that the people of the province have spoken up and voiced their opposition to it. People are outraged and so they should be is certainly how I feel about that because it's wrong and we cannot tolerate that type of behaviour in this hon. House. We're here to raise the bar, not to lower it.

I have so much more to talk about. I have great concerns about this budget. Again, like my hon. colleagues have already stated, *Budget 2016* was regressive and *Budget 2017* continues the regressive measures and continues to impact negatively on the people of Newfoundland and Labrador who voted for what they thought was going to be something better. What they got was something 10,000 times worse.

I would like to move, as the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune, and seconded by the Member for Conception Bay South, that the

amendment that was previously presented, the non-confidence motion, be amended by changing the period at the end thereof to a comma and by adding immediately thereafter the following words: "and that this House also condemns the government for its failure to demonstrate sound leadership and compassion by addressing the needs of Newfoundland and Labrador's most vulnerable: its children, its youth, its seniors, its families, its communities, or its many others who are impacted by its approach."

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune has submitted an amendment to the previous amendment. So this House will take a brief recess to consider that.

Thank you.

### Recess

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Are the Whips ready?

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Yes.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** The Whips are ready.

The Speaker has considered the amendment to the amendment put forward by the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune and found it to be in order.

The Speaker recognizes the hon. Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune.

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

As I stated in the first bit of my budget speech, I truly do believe in our potential as a province and as a people here in Newfoundland and Labrador. While I talked about some of the negatives in my last speech, most of which have been brought on by the Liberal administration, I'm going to focus for the next 20 minutes that I have in terms of talking about some of the great things that are happening in our province and

some of the potential we have for growth opportunities.

In particular, my colleagues, the Minister of Transportation and the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture, in particular, I think will find this next little bit of economic opportunities that I'm going to talk about quite interesting. There's a real, real opportunity right here in Newfoundland and Labrador for us to diversify our economy and build upon both tourism and aquaculture in conjunction with the hydro development that is now underway.

I'm going to tell you, when I was home for the last two weeks, it is absolutely booming in my region, and it is booming because of the aquaculture industry. We're seeing a new entrance there and people are getting up and going to work every day.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MS. PERRY:** The other boom we're seeing in my district is related to hydro and Muskrat Falls. We are now constructing and we're going to save the Avalon Peninsula of the province. We're going to provide you with a backup route for power. The power from Bay d'Espoir, currently we power about 60 per cent of the Island but we can't get past Holyrood.

Well, as part of this whole Muskrat Falls venture, a transmission line is now being built. We have about 150 new livyers in my district for about a year or two. It's great to see all the activity, the booms at the gas stations and the grocery stores and the restaurants. It is absolutely fabulous to see.

In particular, now as this transmission line goes across, there's a new opportunity that we can avail of. I have talked informally about this with some Members of government opposite and I have talked at great length with ministers in the former administration and the former Minister of Transportation about this opportunity. The opportunity that I want to officially put on the record that's been talked about in the District of Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune for at least 20 or 30 years but we've never been able to get there for one reason or another, our biggest impediment being the Bay du Nord Wilderness Reserve and 10 kilometres of a route that went

through that, is the fact that we now have a 72 kilometre road being constructed from Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune to the great District of Fortune, Mr. Speaker, and that road is 72 kilometers across.

That road reduces the travel from my district to St. John's, which now takes about seven hours, should that road be in place we'd get there in three. We'd get our aquaculture product out of the district to the airport in St. John's in three. We'd get to the Argentia ferry much faster. We'd create a tourism loop such that as people came to visit Fortune, they could loop right around the Coast of Bays and come out in Central Newfoundland, in Grand Falls.

I would like to formally put on the record right here in the House of Assembly today –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER (Warr):** Order, please!

**MS. PERRY:** – a request to the Premier, to the Minister of Transportation and to the minister of aquaculture to study the feasibility of maintaining this road which is now being constructed by hydro for purposes of erecting that transmission line, but we are told the road is going to come up, the culverts are going to come up and the Bailey bridge is going to come up.

Well, we now use a hydro access road because of power plants that were built in Upper Salmon. They took a little bit of a beating this year in Hurricane Matthew, but for the last 20 or 30 years, or longer than that certainly, since the '70s people have been using that road for fishing, for hunting, for building cabins. We're only 10 kilometres away from Buchans actually on the opposite side of Upper Salmon.

Certainly, the road to the Burin Peninsula would add so much economic benefit for the people throughout the entire Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker. It would also give us an alternate route for the ferry which now services Rencontre East. They would have road access, 72 kilometres across; whereas, right now we have to drive 567 kilometres to get to St. John's.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**MS. PERRY:** The road comes out in your district, indeed it does. I want you to work with me to lobby your colleagues as well to try and get this road brought from a class C road up to a paved road. And do you know what? I'm going to put it on the table right here in the House of Assembly. It's been talked about for 30 years, and as I said in my last speech, I worked in community economic development for 12 years with the Coast of Bays Corporation.

We actually did a study at that time. The Industry Adjustment Services committee was put in place, chaired by Mr. Churance Rogers, former president of MNL. In that study we identified the road to Burin. The issue we've always had with getting this new road constructed is: How do you ask for 72 kilometres of new road construction when the province can't maintain the existing roads that it has.

Well now we're in a different place, Mr. Speaker, because that road is being put there. It's being put there by Hydro for purposes of a transmission line. So the additional incremental cost to the province is not high, especially in relation to the economic benefit and the new economic opportunities that could result, Mr. Speaker, in return from it.

I would say ever since I was a child, I've heard talk of this road and now we are in a real opportunity to make it happen. I call upon my colleagues in the House, and those who are sitting in the Cabinet seats that can make the decisions to allocate the money, to give this very serious consideration. All jokes aside, this is a real opportunity for significant growth and potential for expansion of both tourism and aquaculture in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. It may also help us realize some cost savings, Mr. Speaker, in relation to operation of some of our services that we provide in this province, like health care and ferries.

The idea of a new route is not new, as I said. It's been discussed by many people for many years. Under the former administration, actually, and I was working with my colleagues, as I said. Work began via Nalcor to create an access route for transmission lines.

On September 18, 2015, it was announced that the Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council would host public hearings in the Town of Milltown, Head of Bay d'Espoir to discuss proposed changes to the Bay du Nord Wilderness Reserve. The discussion was around removing a parcel of land from the reserve to allow for construction of a new transmission line.

Mr. Speaker, the former premier and the former Minister of Transportation and Works, who sit here with us today, can attest that this project has always been one of my top priorities, and the time for action is now. With the development of the hydro road underway, the time for action is now.

I am proud to state that in my district we've been the gold standard for economic diversification, I think, in the literal sense. You see a rural community that is not shrinking but growing in some cases. In the 2011 census I had one community which was growing, Conne River. In the 2015 census, I have two. Pools Cove and Conne River are both growing and all the rest of us are holding our own. In a time of rural decline, that speaks loudly to the potential we certainly have, but we need to continue to look at opportunities that are out there.

The former government's investments in aquaculture and rural development have resulted in growth in an area that was ignored for so long in years previous. It really was. We were the forgotten coast. A lot of people called us Newfoundland's hidden secret, but there was never really a lot of attention paid to our coast. We're nestled on the Southwest Coast. We're kind of remotely removed from everybody, fabulous place, but people are starting to discover what we have. I'm not suggesting by any means that we ignore the fiscal situation that our province is in, but what I am stating is that now is the time to plan. We know that this potential is there; let's plan for it and let's try to achieve it.

We need to research and review our options, whether that is a public-private partnership, self-funding by way of paid access like a toll bridge, partnering with the federal government and possibly indigenous communities, that would open up the South Coast and make it accessible

to tourists and businesses. The opportunity is there for government to put their money where their mouth is as it pertains to economic diversification right there in the Coast of Bays region and in the districts of Fortune and Marystown.

It has always been a matter of slight contention for me when I hear the South Coast referred to as Central Newfoundland. Areas across this province have been regionalized, and this is understandable, but my district is not Central; it is on the Southwest Coast. Now there's an opportunity to capitalize on the scenery and resources that rival any region in our great province.

Creating routes such as these enable people to access the aquaculture product, the tourism product that we have. It would transform our region. I believe it would transform the districts of my colleagues for Fortune and Marystown as well.

We have the ability to alleviate stress, even from Central Health, because we can avail of the medical services over on the Burin Peninsula and the hospitals there. We have the ability to allow the province to explore even more mining and natural resource development. Because, as we are vast in natural resources, opening up this access will certainly open up new opportunities for mining exploration as well.

So I have on the table for you, on record here in *Hansard*, that the Coast of Bays region would very much like to see this government undertake a study of a permanent road to the Burin Peninsula from the Coast of Bays region, 72 kilometres across. It's well underway and, with some additional investment from government, you can make it a reality. We certainly, as people of Fortune Bay –Cape La Hune and as people I'm sure from the districts of Fortune and Marystown, would be very willing to work with government to make this happen.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I've used up way too much time; I'm going to run out. The other initiative that I want to talk about that I see as having potential and that I want to see us talking more about in a positive way is our hydro resources. Talk about renewable resources that you have forever and a day. Our fishery, if managed

properly, this is a renewable resource you can have forever and a day. Our water resources, if managed properly, a renewable resource that we can have forever and a day.

I have to tell you, again, going back to 2015, I was very, very alarmed when I saw the new administration take over and start immediately to condemn Muskrat Falls – and I realize it was part of their political platform in 2011. I realize it was something that gave them legs and momentum, and they did a lot to condemn the project over the years, and it is the role of Opposition to ask questions. But certainly at least two of them were strong proponents of the initiative and worked to move it forward in years prior to their landing in a Liberal government.

Mr. Speaker, it is wrong for the Liberals to say that it's a bad project, it is wrong for them to say that there is no potential export markets out there, and it is wrong for them to be weak in negotiations with Quebec. What does Muskrat Falls do more than anything else for all of us? It gives us a second route to export our power. You can serve this Kool-Aid to your supporters, but I, for one, and many other people like me in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador are not going to fall for it when you say that there are no markets out there.

All one has to do is just go on to the website for Hydro-Quebec, their 2015 annual report, their 2016 annual report. They're not saying no, b'y, there are no markets out there. They're getting ready. They want more facilities. They want more infrastructure to sell more power to the Eastern United States. They clearly state in their documents that their growth avenues are in pursuing export markets, for investments beyond our borders, or in marketing our technologies. They are key to achieving our goal of doubling our revenue by 2030 and increasing our net income.

Boosting the capacity of our generating fleet is another promising growth avenue. Through all our initiatives in the coming years, we will make a greater contribution to Quebec's prosperity.

Well, guess what? Nalcor Energy can do the very same thing for Newfoundland and Labrador, with the right leadership. I can tell

you I, for one, will not stand by and allow the people of this province to be bamboozled into thinking this project should be sold. Because the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are the shareholders of this project and the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are going to reap billions in benefits for years to come.

Please God, when the time comes to negotiate with Quebec, the government of the day will be strong enough and know they don't have to bend over anymore; we have an alternate route to send that power. So if Quebec wants to do business with us, fine, let's do a fair deal, but we're not stuck or beholden to them. We have other options. I think that the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has a responsibility – it's incumbent on them not to walk in and act weak, but to walk in very strongly and say we can do it alone. Because we can; we have proven it. This project will be beneficial to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to talk again about what other provinces who believe in their people and their capabilities can achieve. I tell you that our party certainly believes in the people and the capabilities of our citizens here. But this again, in looking at the way Quebec looks at its hydro power, a major contribution to Quebec's government's revenue. For a fourth consecutive year – this is from their 2016 report – Hydro-Quebec's contribution to the revenue of its sole shareholder, the Quebec government – the people of their province – has exceeded the \$4 billion mark. This amount includes the company's net income of \$2.861 million, \$667 million in water-power royalties, \$284 million in public utilities tax and \$218 million in guarantee fees related to debt securities. This contribution, combined with economic spin-offs from the company's operations in all four corners of the province, will benefit all Quebecers.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the other thing I call upon the Liberal Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to do for the people of this province is to start believing in us, to start believing in our potential and to do what other governments are doing and develop our resources in the best interest of the people as a whole. That, I believe, is absolutely crucial to our moving forward as a people in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Before I wrap up, I also want to thank the Liberals for finally admitting that rates are not going to double because of Muskrat Falls. It worked for you; I acknowledged that in the House in a former speech. It worked for you; it got you political attraction. But it was never true. It was never true when you said it then and it's not true today. There are options to reduce the rates. Stop fear mongering; stop having the seniors of our province worried that they won't be able to turn on the lights because it's wrong, it's not true and you know it.

We have the ability to earn revenue because of our shareholder stake. We have the ability to earn revenue because of excess sales, and if we get on the ball and start exporting like the other provinces are doing, promoting our export capacity, we'll do even better, and the third option we have to lower rates is the interest savings that we're going to realize on the loan guarantee.

The people of this province will not be facing a doubling of rates because of Muskrat Falls. If managed properly, Muskrat Falls will be, in partnership with the Upper Churchill, the key to our sustainability and our well-being and our wealth, unlike we've never seen before in this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. We just need to get there, Mr. Speaker. It takes some strong leadership to get us there, and please God we will realize it in the very near, foreseeable future. I look forward to working with you on the road to the Burin from the Coast of Bays.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER (Warr):** The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

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

I'm very happy to stand and speak to the sub-amendment to the motion.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to continue on where my colleague for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi left off. She was talking about sort of more of the macroeconomic issues and economic indicators, and I think she did a great job of that, looking at seven specific points' indicators.



Again, those are available in the government documents; the indicators that show us where we are with GDP, where we are with unemployment. We know unemployment is one of the rare things that is actually increasing. All the indicators that you would want to increase are decreasing and all the indicators you would want to decrease are increasing. For example, like unemployment.

What she talked about was: what's really happening economically and fiscally in the province? What is really happening? How do we talk about that in real terms and what does that mean for the people of the province? So I'd like to continue on a bit from there.

She was speaking about those broader macroeconomic issues and I'd like to drill down a little bit and look at what are some of the decisions and how they affect the lives of the average Newfoundlander and Labradorian who is depending on this government to help them make it through this really tough economic time. Because there's no doubt about it, it's a tough economic time, mostly because not only this administration but the previous one really did nothing to diversify the economy, really did nothing to build sustainable economies in communities across the province.

What we have is a very vulnerable population, not in terms of whether somebody is old or not, or whether their health is strong or not, but our communities are very vulnerable because there hasn't been real, solid economic diversification across the province, really looking at what are our strengths? How do we capitalize on those strengths? How do we ensure that we have a province that can prosper, where we have growth, where we have stability in the job market? None of that's been done for a number of years, Mr. Speaker. In fact, what we have is a really vulnerable province.

What we have seen is we have a government right now who is solely depending on oil revenues, which we have absolutely no control over, which is a volatile market right now. We see that we're in this economic situation, this downturn because of the drop of oil revenues, but also because of the unfair and lack of progressive taxation that we have in the province

as well. So those are a few factors that really make our province quite vulnerable right now.

This budget has done nothing, as my colleague for St. John's East – Quidi Vidi has stated, has done nothing to mitigate that vulnerability. That this government's plan is basically resting on a wing and a prayer and a hope. They're just hoping oil will go back up and praying – they have their fingers crossed – that oil is not going to go down. They have no control over that. We have no control over that. So we're still left in an even more vulnerable position.

Because what we're doing is the people of Newfoundland and Labrador are still reeling from the decisions made in budget '16-'17, where the economic downturn, the economic pressures and the economic crisis that the government spoke about so often before they brought their budget down in 2016, and then all through that budgetary period they kept saying basically that the bottom was out of it. That in fact it was all doom and gloom; yet, have done nothing to mitigate that except put it on the backs of your average working Newfoundlander and Labradorian. So I'd like to talk a little bit about that, Mr. Speaker. There are other things this government should be doing, could have been doing and kind of missed the boat on it.

So the Budget Speech from the Minister of Finance, which was delivered last month, is a bit of an exercise in political obfuscation. What we need now more than ever is absolute clarity, absolute clarity and accountability and transparency, because the people of the province are bearing the burden of the economic situation that we face as a province. We are not all carrying that burden equally, and not all people can carry that burden equally, but not all people are asked to carry that burden equally. The Minister of Finance, in her Budget Speech in the previous year, talked about now we're all going to have to roll up our sleeves, we're all going to have to bear part of the economic burden, but it wasn't shared equally, Mr. Speaker.

The basic narrative of the speech from the minister for this budget is that things are looking up and that it is a much better budget than the one which attracted so much backlash a year ago. Well, the thing is, I'm not so sure how this government, if they're talking about this budget

as a good budget, how do they measure success? Of course, this budget is a direct result of the last budget they brought in. It was the first budget they did as the new administration here.

So what we need to do is – really, a budget is not about money. A budget is about a vision and about a plan for how you will bring your province forward. In this tough economic time, as in 2016, really what the government should be looking at is how do we strengthen our individuals, how do we strengthen our community, how do we mitigate the negative pressures and forces that are pushing down on our economy? It's not about how we balance the books. Balance for whom? How are they measuring success? So if she's saying she feels that this is a much better budget, better for whom, better in what ways? Because, again, we're still reeling from the effects.

Some people were really creamed in the last budget and there's been nothing to mitigate that. They're still living with the effects of that. In this budget, there's nothing to relieve them from the dire situation that many people were faced in because of the last budget, and there's nothing strengthening them or strengthening our communities any more than there was in 2016 and 2017, which is what a budget really should do.

Particularly, in tough economic times the role of government is to strengthen our communities, to strengthen also private industry, to work hand in hand with private industry so that we can all weather the storm. That hasn't happened.

So, in her preamble, the minister said last year government made hard choices and asked taxpayers to dig deep into their pockets. Well, they sure did – they sure did – and it was really hard for a number of people who already had been digging way, way deep in their pockets in order just to put food on the table. So again, some may have dug a little deeper than others, but really those who were most affected negatively and were creamed by last year's budget were people who were lower and middle-income earners.

She went on to say we are on a path to gain control of our finances and then she went so far as to claim that *Budget 2017* reflects progress.

I've looked for it. Then since *Budget 2016*, we've had the document *The Way Forward*, but for many, Mr. Speaker, it's the way backwards. They're worse off last year and this year than they were the years previous to the past two budgets.

There's no way forward for them. This is not the way forward for them. This is a way backward. In the same way that this flatter, meaner approach is not flatter, leaner; it's flatter, meaner for many people again who were creamed in the 2016-2017 budget. This government had an obligation to mitigate the damage – because it's damaged, and I'll talk a little bit about that, because I'm not the only one – I know that many MHAs here, many of my colleagues here in the House, get calls from people in their districts who are really hurting.

Now, you could say, as once the Minister of Health and Community Services said, what do you want, a utopia, when we talked to him about the need for over-the-counter drugs and the need for an Adult Dental Program. He said: What do you want, a utopia? Well, no, we don't want a utopia, but what we do want is we want people to be healthy, again so that they can weather this storm.

We're not looking for utopia, but we're looking for fairness and for justice, and again to strengthen our communities, to strengthen our individuals so that we can weather this storm. Unlike what the Minister of Health and Community Services said when we talked about over-the-counter drugs, that program was cut, and the Adult Dental Program – I have a gentleman in my district who was trying to pull out his tooth with pliers, and he still doesn't have the dental care he needs.

I visited an elderly woman in her house last week who has no teeth. She has no teeth and she cannot get teeth. She is not eligible for dentures. She talked about how much weight she has lost because she can't eat properly. I spoke with another man, a man in his late 50s, he's on Income Support and he is having a hard time getting the dental care that he needs.

Now, the minister said well, you go one by one to the Dental Program and they'll review the case. People aren't getting through and they're

not getting the dental care they really need. These are people who've already had to dig deep into their pockets to somehow mitigate the damage that was done by the previous administration and where we are with our economy now, but they didn't have anything left down there in those deep, dark pockets. They don't have a reserve so that they can go to the dentist and get their teeth fixed or get a pair of dentures.

One gentleman in my district lost his dentures because he had been moving so often. His gums are infected now. There's no way he can afford dentures. He simply cannot afford dentures. Our seniors cannot afford their dental care. They simply can't because there is no excess. They don't have any nest eggs. They don't have any nest eggs at all.

I've gotten a bit ahead of myself because I really want to talk about how do you measure whether a budget is successful; on what terms; what is success, that you're going to get to a balance; but if our people are not strengthened, if our people are weakened, success for who. If their health is affected negatively, how do you measure that as success? I don't know how you measure that as success. It makes no sense to me. So balanced for who?

In this budget, again, there is no relief. There is no relief for the people who were already hit in that flatter, meaner approach. Again, whether or not you look at it as a moral obligation or to be nice and to be charitable, the other side of it as well is that this is costing us more. Because I have people in my district who end up at emergency which costs way more than getting a tooth properly pulled and taken care of. It's way more costly. So there are people who had to make really hard choices, but there are people who could make no choices at all because they didn't have any reserves.

Mr. Speaker, it's political spin. *Budget 2017* is a slightly modified version of *Budget 2016*. It's like you know you have the boiled dinner, the hash, the next day, this is just hash and rehash. What they've done, they've served up hash. We've had a boiled dinner and now they've served up hash. This is just rehash. That's all it is; this is hash.

**MS. MICHAEL:** Hash tastes good; this doesn't.

**MS. ROGERS:** Hash tastes good, but you can't live on hash alone.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MS. ROGERS:** This is rehash. This is just rehash is what it is.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**MS. ROGERS:** Well, you know, there are all kinds of hash.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MS. ROGERS:** But I tell you what we're looking at here is a rehashed budget from 2016. What they've done is they've kind of mitigated a bit in the taxes for gas, but that's about it.

What people were faced with in 2016 is what they're faced with in 2017. There is no relief. As a matter of fact, government is telling us themselves that the unemployment rate has gone up. So, as a matter of fact, people aren't even holding their ground. We know that we're going to have more unemployment and this government hasn't shown us in any way, shape or form what they are going to do to sustain the economy, to grow the economy, to mitigate the increasing unemployment.

There's very little policy here. What we see is we have again a Minister of Finance who is really proud of her budget. It's an odd thing because it is a rehash of 2016, with not a whole lot of relief. We see that significantly higher oil revenues paid for a reduction in the gas tax, but again that is really vulnerable. It's precarious, because this government has no control over the oil prices. This government has no control over the volume. It can have control over the royalty amount that's being paid, but has no control over the price of oil.

There is a barrage of tax and fee increases that were announced in 2016; all of those are still intact. The levy is still intact. So people are still digging deep into their pockets. Again, there's less in their pockets with this budget, a year later, because the budget from 2016 to 2017 did

nothing to help people out who are already digging so deep that they were at the bottom of their pockets.

So the minister closed her speech by claiming: “Our focus will always” – I’m quoting her now – “be on positioning our province to be an ideal place to raise a family ....” And you know what, Mr. Speaker; in many ways our province is an ideal place to raise a family, except now it’s getting worse and worse. It’s getting harder and harder; unemployment up, the incredible cost of child care, the extra fees and taxes.

Housing hasn’t really gone down; we see a slow in housing starts. And all of us – I know that all of us – are hearing about young families saying or young people saying, you know what, I don’t see how I can stay, and young families saying the same thing, I don’t see how I can stay.

And then older people saying I don’t see how I can stay in my community as well because unemployment is growing in my rural community and a lot of people are leaving in my community. So a lot of older people are saying I’m going to go to the Mainland. I’m going to Canada to join my children and my grandchildren.

Mr. Speaker, really what a budget should do – a budget is not just about numbers or going line by line or doing zero-based budgeting. That’s not what a budget is. A budget is about a vision. A budget is about how we would do this in order to strengthen our people, strengthen our communities, strengthen our economy and work creatively with private industry because, again, we all have to bear the burden; we’re all in this together.

But I see no evidence whatsoever of government maximizing on the potential of all of us working together. It’s not there. There’s nothing concrete there. But what we have is a rehashing, a serving of cold hash with nothing new for the people of the province, nothing at all. Not only that but real household income is forecast to decrease every year for the next five years. What is this government going to do about it? They haven’t shown us anything about what they’re going to do about it.

Again, balancing a budget is not just about balancing money, it’s about looking at how we can sustain our communities. Or you know what; maybe they don’t want to sustain their communities. That’s a possibility. Maybe that’s part of the plan that we can’t really see, the concrete plan. Maybe part of the plan is that they don’t want to sustain the communities. I don’t know. I can’t figure it out.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member that her speaking time has expired.

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

I look forward to speaking again.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. K. PARSONS:** I’ll always say it’s indeed a pleasure to get up and represent the beautiful people and the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis.

The Member for St. John’s Centre got up and she talked a bit about hash. Now that’s probably one of my favourite foods of all time. My mother used to call it couldn’ts. It was stuff that you couldn’t eat on Sunday so you had it on Monday. It was called couldn’ts in our household.

Mr. Speaker, we’re going to get lots of opportunities to talk on the budget. Today, I’m going to get into a couple of areas where I’d like to get into and talk about my district and stuff like that. I know the Member for Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune, who did a fantastic job today in speaking, she mentioned volunteers. I had the opportunity last week, and I’m sure all Members in this House had the opportunity, to go to different functions in their district because it was Volunteer Week.

We are so fortunate in Newfoundland and Labrador to have so many people that are willing to step up and do things for others because that's what volunteers do. Whether it's a volunteer fire department or a soccer association or whatever it is, people do things to help others. I believe living in the best province in Canada that we're very fortunate to have so many people that are willing to step forward and volunteer.

I had opportunity last week to attend three functions in my district; one was in Pouch Cove where the town council did a fantastic job recognizing their volunteers. I went to one in Flatrock. They had a great thing, they presented to each – Flatrock is a community of about 1,600 people and there are 14 different groups in that community. So they presented them all with a nice little plaque. It just showed the town, showed how much they appreciate it. For the first time ever they did a thing that's going to be in the community centre from here on in where they recognize two volunteers.

Now, the selection that they had was wicked but they got it down to two names and I'm sure it's going to continue for years. Nancy Gosse was the female and Danny Kavanagh was the male. I don't know if any of you remember, Danny used to be the fellow that used to be on for Sobeys in the morning talking on VOXM all the time. He's a real nice guy. I want to congratulate the two of them. Torbay also recognized all their volunteers. Pete Soucy, who's the honorary chair this year, was down and gave a few words. It was a really nice time.

It's really good to see our municipalities come out and to show appreciation to people that keep our communities going. I mean it doesn't make any difference what size your community is, whether it's the City of St. John's or it's the Town of Bauline, everybody is appreciative of what people do for us. So it's very important that we recognize them.

On behalf of all of us here on this side, and I'm sure all Members of this House of Assembly, thank you to all the volunteers in this province that do so much for all of us. Thank you so much.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. K. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, on Friday also I had opportunity to go to Pouch Cove. The Minister of Municipal Affairs wasn't available to go but the parliamentary secretary went along and we had an announcement in Pouch Cove about the water.

The council that's in Pouch Cove right now, when they were first elected, two weeks in they called me and they wanted to go to a meeting. Always, from years gone by, it was a problem in Pouch Cove with their water and stuff like this.

But this new council said let's have a meeting; we want to make it the number one priority for our town that we fix the water situation in Pouch Cove. In all municipalities there are so many needs. Over the years there were roads needs and there are all kinds of municipal needs and recreation needs and stuff.

But this council said we want to make sure that we fix the water situation in Pouch Cove. So they put a committee together who were members of council and they started a water committee. And we came in right off the bat. I believe the first one we met with was – the minister of Municipal Affairs at the time was Minister Kent. The committee came in and we met with him and we started the process.

**MR. KENT:** We came up with some money, too.

**MR. K. PARSONS:** You did come up with some money, too.

And the process basically started that first of all, the problem in the town was the amount of water they were using. At that time, they were using about 650 gallons a minute, which probably would have been able to do the size of Gander, and the actual water said that they should be down to about 250, 220 and stuff like that.

So the very first thing we had to do was get some funding to find out where all this water was going. So we got the funding and we found some big leaks, and they got the water usage down to about 220 gallons a minute. So that was one stage of the whole thing.

Then when we went back and we met with the Department of Environment and we met with

Municipal Affairs, they came up and said you're going to have to do some pilot projects. Go and get three companies to come in and find solutions to the water issue. That year, under all of us, we used to know how much money each district basically was getting and stuff like that. And this was very important to my district.

The other towns in the district, I said, you know, everybody's looking for a little piece of the pie, no matter if it's a recreation need, roads needs or whatever. But the other towns – which was the amazing thing – in the district agreed to give up the money that they were going to get that year to give it all to Pouch Cove if it meant getting them water.

That year they were fortunate enough to get around \$900,000 and that was amazing because what that did, it took care of all the engineering costs that we needed to do. It also took care of all the costs of the pilot projects to get these companies in to be able to do the process.

The problem with the pond down there that they're using is during the winter months the water is not too bad because the ice is on the water on top and the water is just running through. But come the spring of the year when there's a lot of runoff and in the summer months when there's rain and stuff like this, the pond rises. So the water quality is not that bad but the colour, if you saw the colour of the water, it turns right brown and it looks really, really, really bad.

So what they needed is this filtration system that goes in front of the thing, in front of the pump house. So anyway, through the jigs and reels and everything, they had the pilot projects come in. I'll thank the Minister of Municipal Affairs and thank the federal government for coming through on Friday with almost \$4 million. We got a new system that's going to be put in on –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. K. PARSONS:** Yeah, and I thank everybody that were involved. I hope that the people in Pouch Cove really appreciate the amount of work that their council and everybody did to ensure this comes true. Now, we still got a ways to go to get all the money put in place and get the tenders out and stuff like that, but it's an

exciting time for a town like Pouch Cove, so it's great to see.

The thing about it, I got to thank the parliamentary secretary for giving me the opportunity –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. K. PARSONS:** – to speak at the announcement. I really appreciate it. It meant a lot to me, as he knows it did.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. K. PARSONS:** No, it wasn't guaranteed that I could speak, but they did let me speak after a while.

The other thing I want to mention – and, again, sometimes I talk too much about one thing; I was only going to talk about that for two minutes. Anyway, I want to also mention the new school that just opened in my district last week.

When I was down to the announcement in Pouch Cove on Friday I said, this has been a banner week. Being a banner week, we opened a new school in Torbay. Again, the thing about everything and how we work together, I mentioned volunteers earlier, it's a combination of everybody working together to be able to get results.

We were very fortunate in our area that the school councils started this, and it started probably in 2010, getting together to do a proposal to go to the school board for a new school in the area. And we all knew that the area like Cape St. Francis Elementary was full to capacity; Holy Trinity Elementary, way over. The school itself probably had 300 more students than it should really have in it, and the high school was at a level that was really high also; it was full to capacity.

So the school councils got together, and I have to give them credit because they all got together and they came up with a plan to fix all three schools in the area and make it work. And finally this week, with a lot of hard work from a lot of people, when I went down into the school – I had the opportunity on Tuesday. The

principal called me and said: Kevin, if you want to come down on Day 1, we'll do a tour and go through the classrooms. To see the smiles on students' faces and the teachers' faces, the beautiful new school they have. It's absolutely beautiful. It's something that I think all our students in the province should have, is have the opportunity to have a school as beautiful as the new one we have in Torbay.

I really want to thank all the people who put a lot of effort and a lot of time into it. Sometimes our school councillors take a lot of flak, if things are not going right, if it's busing or whatever, they – you're on the school council, you're representing me and sometimes it's a hard and thankless job. But I really have to say they really stuck together, they did the job and the results are unbelievable with the new intermediate school in Torbay. So a good job for everybody. Like I said, it was a great week last week with the two of those things.

Now, Mr. Speaker, today I really want to talk a little bit about budgets. I've been here for, I don't know, nine budgets now, eight or nine budgets and this year's budget is a little different. Every other time we were in budget and we were in the lockdown, we could see where changes were made. You could always look at the budget and say, okay, there's an increase in this or there's a decrease in this, but this budget got so many hidden things in it. It's terrible; it really is.

We went down on Friday and had a briefing down at the Finance Department and I'm sure everyone that was there came out shaking their heads, just like I did. It was, oh, you got to find it in here. I love Estimates. When we were on the government side, if somebody didn't want to sit in on Estimates – because government Members usually sit here in the back – I always used to sit in because you find a few things out and stuff like this, but the questions – you'd see how they're spending money and it would be interesting watching ministers answer it.

I did Estimates already. I did one set of Estimates with Fisheries. There was so much in it that wasn't there and so many questions not answered. Where's this? Oh, we're going to find this or we're going to find that. The people of the province are asking us about the budget.

What effect does this budget have on us? The answers that we got the first week we were here – now, we were only here – they came down with the budget, we had two days and we went on break. So, for two days, we were here in the House of Assembly and every minister over on the other side got up and said: You'll get that answer in Estimates.

Madam Speaker, the people of the province want the answer here in the House of Assembly. They want to be able to hear it when a minister is asked a question. Too many times in this House of Assembly – and I know people who watch the House of Assembly. They say they don't answer the questions. Nobody answers the questions. People watch because they want to know. They want to see what's happening with their government. They want to see what's happening in different departments, whether it's through Service NL or it's through Fisheries, or it's through Transportation or it's through Health. People want to know the answers to questions.

This government is so secretive, so secretive that they just won't come out – until somebody finds it, until we get a reporter or somebody that comes out – I don't think it's very funny, the Member for Bonavista; I don't know why you're laughing. I don't think it's very funny that you're hiding things and won't come out. Until the media told us about Bern Coffey this week, you weren't going to come out with none of that. That would never happen; he'd be still clerk of the House.

**MADAM SPEAKER (Dempster):** Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member to direct his comments to the Chair.

**MR. K. PARSONS:** Yes, Madam Speaker, I'd rather direct it to you than direct it to him, I tell you that right now. You got no worries about that, Madam Speaker, I guarantee you. It's an absolute pleasure to direct them to you rather than direct them to the Member for Bonavista, I guarantee you that, because he doesn't have a clue what he's talking about.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. K. PARSONS:** Anyway, Madam Speaker, what I really want to talk about is the effect that this budget is having on families. I had the opportunity just a couple of weeks ago to sit down with a gentleman and we were talking about grandchildren and I was telling them that pretty soon I'm going to become a grandpa, and I'm really excited about it and I was telling him that. I told the story the other day. He's thing to me is – he got five or six grandchildren, and he told me how he's losing three of them because they have to move away.

This budget last year – even when the minister read her Budget Speech this year, she talked about going in and reaching into the pockets of people in Newfoundland and Labrador. Well, they reached in last year and they took out \$6,000 out of the average household. Now, for all the stuff this great budget that you did this year, what did you do? You still reached in; there's another \$6,000 coming out this year. You did absolutely nothing. What, you reduced the gas tax by eight cents? The 300 bills, all the fees and everything else that you brought in last year is still there.

Talk to seniors, talk to families in this province and they'll tell you that they're finding it hard because of the increase in their insurance, increase in gas, the cost of food. All this stuff has a chain effect, Madam Speaker. When people have to pay more for gas and they have to pay higher insurance rates, someone is going to pay for it. We see it in our grocery stores.

Someone mentioned here today – I was speaking to a real good friend of mine last weekend; he's a roofer. This time last year, he told me, his business, he was booked right until July. He had enough work, everyone will start – because after the winter people will say it's time to replace the shingles this year, I'm going to get it done and stuff like that. He told me just last week, he'd be lucky if he gets through the month of May.

Do you know why people are not replacing their shingles? Because they can't afford to, because they're afraid to. Every cent that they have in their pockets they have to figure out, listen, something – if an emergency comes up. Now they will replace their shingles, obviously, if they get leaks and stuff like that, but a lot of people look at that and do home renovations.

They look at their home renovations and they'll say, okay, I'll do my windows this year; we'll save a few dollars. But you take \$6,000 out of their pockets last year and take another \$6,000 out of their pockets this year; they can't afford to do it.

What effect does that have on our whole economy? What effect does it have that that guy is not – you know, this government looks at their figures and they'll say, oh boy, we're going to lose 30,000 jobs. Well, this guy who does the roofing, he probably hires 10 people every summer. So how many people is he not going to be able to rehire this year because there's no work on the go?

We always say over here, you had no plan. Do you know what? It's obvious that you had no plan. You didn't plan on all these taxes and all these fees, what it was going to do our economy. I really believe it. I don't think you looked at it and said, okay, this is what this is going to have. This is the effect that this is going to have on our seniors, on our families, on hard-working Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and I really believe it.

I believe that you just never looked at it and said, okay, if we jack up these 300 fees and charge this much for this and charge that much, or increase this, increase that, what effect it would have on our economy, what effect it would have on people doing renovations. I mean what effect –

**MR. KING:** We didn't blow \$25 million.

**MR. K. PARSONS:** The Member for Bonavista is saying blew \$25 million. Well, I'll tell you what they blew down my way. They built a school in Torbay, they built another road and they built recreation facilities everywhere –

**MR. KING:** Point of order.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Bonavista on a point of order.

**MR. KING:** The Member for Cape St. Francis is accusing me of saying something I didn't say. It was made by another Member.



**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

There is no point of order.

The hon. Member for Cape St. Francis.

**MR. K. PARSONS:** Madam Speaker, that's the same Member that got up a couple of weeks ago and accused me of saying that he was afraid – the same Member that got up.

**MR. KING:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. K. PARSONS:** I know you're not afraid, I didn't accuse you.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. K. PARSONS:** I'm sorry. That's it.

Anyway, Madam Speaker, my whole point to make is what they've done to the economy and what they've done to people in this province. They've done so much to hurt people in this province and they just don't realize it.

They're over on the other side laughing and having a great time, but they don't realize that there are seniors out there today and families in this province that are having a hard time. They're having difficulty paying their bills. They're trying to figure out where they're going to get the money to do renovations on their home.

The more you take out of people's money it has a snowball effect, Madam Speaker. It has a snowball effect. People don't spend money, they don't hire carpenters, they don't hire plumbers, they don't hire electricians. By people not having work, that affects our economy because people are not spending any money. If you look at our budget and saw what our GDP is going to be this year, people are not spending money and the reason why they're not – retail sales are down. The reason retail sales are down is because people don't have the money to spend anymore.

Again, I go back to the point that this government started off and they said – I'll always remember it too – we'll have a plan. We have a plan and you're going to like it. We got a plan and you're going to like it, because we

were saying give us your plan, show us your plan.

Well, I'd like to know how many people in this province like the plan of that government over there. I don't think there are very many. I don't think there's very many that like that plan. The plan they're all going to like, where they're going to have no increases, taxes are not going to go up, there'll be no layoffs. We got a plan. That's great to say when you're running an election. It's great to say it when you're on an election but when you get elected, you come through and say, well, we didn't mean that, or that wasn't the way we wanted to do things. No, we're going to change things all of a sudden, but people gave you the opportunity. They gave you the opportunity to go and be the elected officials for them, and you let them down.

You made promises that you knew you couldn't keep and here today you wonder why people are feeling like they do about this government, because people want a government they can trust. People want a government they can look up to and say, okay, that's what that guy promised and that's what he did. That's what people in the province want from elected officials. They want to be able to look at us and say I trust that fellow. I trust that he can do a good job for me, but this province has absolutely no trust in this government across the way and there's a real good reason for it. There's a real good reason for it because they were sold a bunch of goods that you knew you couldn't deliver. You couldn't deliver it, you told them you would, and people in the province, you wonder why they're upset with you.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MADAM SPEAKER:** The Speaker recognizes the hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

**MS. ROGERS:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

I am happy again to stand and speak to the sub-amendment. It's obvious that the government side, my colleagues on the government side, the Liberals are refusing to stand and speak in defence of their budget. I don't know what that's

about. It's an odd kind of thing, Madam Speaker. One would think that in fact they would hop to it and speak in great defence of the budget because they all think it's pretty good.

They all think it's very, very good, Madam Speaker, and now I can hear them cackling over there when, in fact, they had lots of opportunity to stand and to speak in defence of this budget, and they're not doing it. So I'll happily speak to the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and talk to them about the budget and the shortfalls that I think are in this budget.

That's shameful, Madam Speaker. One would think – their Minister of Finance was so proud of this budget. She talked about how it's such a good budget and that it's going to bring us forward. They got their *Way Forward* –

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MS. ROGERS:** – although everybody feels that things are going backward.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I remind the hon. Member for St. John's Centre that she has spoken once to the sub-amendment and she can only speak once.

Seeing no further speakers, I will call the vote.

The Speaker recognizes the hon. Member for Mount Pearl North.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Well, Mount Pearl North was on his feet first and that's who I saw and I recognize you.

**MR. KENT:** Okay. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Surely, government isn't interested in rushing the budget debate. I thank the House Leader for recognizing that we still have speakers on this side. If government Members choose not to speak – and I honestly can't blame them – that's their prerogative, but we will continue to speak. We have lots of concerns about this budget that need to be raised.

When it comes to this budget, I heard a lot of people say – and I've spoken on the budget already but I'll just sort of pick up where I left off. I'll talk a little bit about why – despite the noise in here, Madam Speaker, it's interesting that's not being called.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. KENT:** It's interesting what I'm hearing since the budget. Of course, people are now focused on other challenges facing this government today. We've heard lots in the last 24 hours or so about conflict of interest with the former clerk of Executive Council, political appointee, former Liberal leadership candidate Bern Coffey.

I don't want to say too much about Mr. Coffey. Obviously, he was in a clear conflict of interest, but the real issue, when it comes to that story and all that's unfolded in the last little while, is what it illustrates about the Premier's judgement or lack thereof. It's understandable that people are focused on that story at this point in time because we have a situation where somebody who was clearly in conflict of interest, somebody who makes a living suing the government was put in charge of being directly involved in running the government.

So it really raises questions about the Premier's judgement, and that's deeply concerning. I understand why people are concerned; I understand why there's been much public discussion about that in the last few days, particularly in the last 24 hours, but it's important that we take time in this House as well to talk about the budget.

What I heard some people say following the budget debate was well, you know, it could have been worse I suppose. Well, I suppose it could have been, but it's important to keep in perspective what we saw in *Budget 2017*. It was basically – as the Member for St. John's Centre pointed out earlier today – just a rehash of *Budget 2016*.

Last year we saw 300 new taxes and fees introduced – 300. In this year's budget, 299 of them remained untouched. We also saw an

adjustment to the gas tax, tax and fee increase number 300. So it was more or less a status quo budget.

We continue to see some tweaking within the public service. In some cases to make room for more Liberal appointees, appointees like Mr. Coffey, and there have been dozens of others. We've heard lots of heckling this afternoon from the Liberals.

This is a government that talked lots about their Independent Appointments Commission and how they were going to take the politics out of appointments. I think we now have a list where just about every department and agency in government has had Liberal friends appointed in the last 12 months. Dozens of people have been appointed.

Now, in some cases, are they qualified? Well, I hope. I hope in many cases they're qualified, but in some cases it just doesn't really add up. Politicizing the Executive Council, politicizing the most senior office in the bureaucracy, the most senior public servant in government, in any government, that's really troubling.

The Premier talked at length today about transition period. Well, there should never have been a transition period required. The man should never have been appointed to the job in the first place given the clear conflict of interest that existed, but I digress.

We have a budget where we saw lots of taxes and fees increased. We saw all kinds of programs and services cut, and none of that was addressed in *Budget 2017*.

Take health care, for instance. Last year we saw cuts to home care hours. We've had calls from families all over Newfoundland and Labrador, certainly lots in my own district and in St. John's and Mount Pearl, but also from people from all over Newfoundland and Labrador, whose families have been affected by cuts to home care hours. Well, no changes being made in 2017.

We also saw a situation where the Adult Dental Program, as I spoke to earlier today, was cut. So now we have seniors who can't get their dentures. We have people who were waiting;

who were scheduled to get dental surgery and now can't get that work done. Oral health in so many ways affects overall health, physical health and mental health. It's troubling that none of those issues were addressed in *Budget 2017*.

Members opposite talked also about my speculation that there would be cuts coming to health care. Well there were, in fact, cuts to health care. One of the things I found challenging for my brief stint as Minister of Health and Community Services is that when you start working on next year's budget, there's a whole bunch of assumptions that you have to make going into the process. Because of inflation, because of contractual obligations to many health care professionals, including doctors and specialists and so on, nurses, and the many other health care professionals.

When you look inflation, contractual obligations, when you look at increased demand on the system due to aging demographics and just the realities in Newfoundland and Labrador, you've got an increase of 3 to 5 per cent annually before you do anything. Before you make any budget decisions, before you add anything or remove anything you've got to factor in that you've got about 3 to 5 per cent of an increase out of the gates. Interestingly enough, what that translates into is somewhere between \$100 million and \$150 million.

If we saw this year a status quo budget in health care, which we pretty well did. The numbers are overall, the numbers are pretty well the same as last year. That's not to say there weren't cuts in certain places and funds added in other places, but if it's a status quo budget overall, well that means there's been a cut. That means there's been a cut between \$100 million and \$150 million. Because when you look at inflation, when you look at increased demands on the system, when you look at the annual contractual obligations that have to be met based on the personnel we have employed in the health care system, then that's an increase of 3 to 5 per cent out of the gates.

That's exactly why when we talk about negotiations around the Health Accord federally, there's an escalator clause that's been in place. In the past I believe it was – I'm going from memory now; I think it was 5 or 6 per cent

because health ministers, governments across the country, recognized that there is an increase in health care costs every year if you simply do nothing and ride with the status quo.

A status quo budget means, in fact, that we've seen cuts in the health care system. What we don't know yet is what the impact will be. We know what last year's impact will be because as bad as last year's budget was, you could at least tell from the budget documents where some of the cuts were. Government, to its credit last year, even provided us a list and said here are a whole bunch of the cuts we've made throughout government. Well, this year, smoke and mirrors; no such list exists. If you read the budget documents, things have been moved around so much that it's impossible to tell what's been cut and what hasn't been cut.

There was a much better PR job done this year, but the fact remains that this year's budget is no better than last year. It could even be worse. If we actually were able to compare apples to apples, it could be worse; but because of the way money has been moved around, it's really difficult to tell.

The Finance Minister likes to talk at length about zero-based budgeting. I understand the concept of zero-based budgeting, but that's just being used as an excuse for this moving money around so that we can't really get a full sense of what's gone on in the budget. We're finding that through the Estimates Committee process that we're now going through. We can't get ministers to answer questions in the House of Assembly during Question Period, as we saw before the Easter break. We'll keep participating because, hopefully, through this budget debate, we can at least shine a light on some of these issues and even get some answers.

There have been cuts. For instance, I'm looking at the headline of the paper on March 29, 2017 and the headline on the front page is: 93 jobs cut in health care. Well, that's only the tip of the iceberg because there's inevitably, based on this budget that we see in front of us, going to be more changes and more impacts.

I'd like to go back to the Throne Speech for a moment. There was very little said, unfortunately, in the Throne Speech a few days

before the budget. The headline of *The Telegram* on Wednesday, March 29, was Throne Speech looks backward, not forward. That was exactly our assessment as well; extremely light on content, light on substance, just like the budget that followed a few days later; very little detail, lots of flowery statements and no ability to really tell what's been taken out. So could it have been worse? I suppose it could have been worse, but it was pretty bad as it was.

When we look at the Throne Speech that came right before the budget, we saw lots of rhetoric and buzz words, similar to *The Way Forward* document that government likes to point to these days. Words like complete, develop, outline, advance, focus, collaborate and leverage, but not a lot of detail, not a lot of firm commitments to anything. There was lots of focus in the Throne Speech this year about the past, but very little about the future. People are looking for some hope. People are looking for some optimism. People are looking for some confidence and a reason to believe that there's a bright future here in Newfoundland and Labrador. Those of us on this side of the House still believe that there is.

When you look at the assets that we possess as a province, the future is very, very bright. But we need a government that will manage those assets in a responsible way. We need a government that will make sound decisions that will position us well for the future. Some of the actions that we took in the past did position the province well for the future. Up until this current downturn, we had several really strong years of economic growth – over a decade of strong economic growth.

We're seeing lots of focus by this government on actions that we took related to energy development, health care and multi-year infrastructure funding, long-term care and violence prevention. Speaking of long-term care, that's another interesting one. The current government likes to celebrate that they're going to award a contract to build a long-term care facility in Corner Brook. Well, unfortunately, those beds would be open by now, had the Liberal government not cancelled our long-term care plan to open 360 new beds this year in 2017. That was all in place and one of the first actions this government had taken when it took office was cancelling that plan.

I'm glad that, finally, there's movement towards new long-term care beds on the West Coast, but there's still a huge demand in the Central part of the province, in Central Region. We had a plan that was going to put 120 new beds, split between the Gander area and the Grand Falls-Windsor area, and there's still a need for those beds. We had a plan that would have created 120 new beds on the Northeast Avalon; also desperately needed.

The last time I checked the numbers, the demand was greatest in Eastern Region. I don't know today whether that's the case. As I'm sure the minister would tell you as well, those numbers do fluctuate on an almost daily basis, but there's no doubt about it, Mr. Speaker, the demand for long-term care is real.

We now see a plan that will address long-term care needs in Corner Brook in the future. We're hearing rumblings that there's something more coming for Central. We've heard very little about the plan for Eastern Region. The wait-list has grown substantially over the last 18 months on the Liberal government's watch. That is really concerning and it hasn't been addressed in *Budget 2017*.

It's great that there's now some movement on a long-term care facility for the West Coast, but it would have been built by now. The beds in Grand Falls-Windsor and in Gander and in the Northeast Avalon Region would also be operational by now, had the government proceeded with the plan that was in place in 2015.

This is a government that also campaigned on being afraid of any kind of private sector involvement in the delivery of any of these services. Now they've engaged in P3 builds on multiple buildings. Perhaps that's the right decision. The value-for-money case may actually make sense and may actually say that that is the right decision in the long run. We'll see that value-for-money analysis in good time. I hope, at the end of the day, that will save the province money, but you can't have it both ways. You can't campaign on saying you won't do it and then you do it, but that's been a consistent pattern with this government. I think that's why people have lost trust. I think it's why people have lost confidence.

When you look at what's going on today in Newfoundland and Labrador politics, when you look at the scandal involving the clerk of the Executive Council, the highest office within the public service, it's really troubling. It just speaks to the ongoing poor leadership, the ongoing mismanagement, the lack of competent administration, at the most senior level. It's scary. We need to bring those issues to the House of Assembly and we'll continue to bring those issues to the House of Assembly.

But we can't lose sight of what's contained and what's not contained in this budget. It is another bad-news budget. It's a budget that is doing nothing to help our economy grow. If you look at the statistics that are presented in the government's own economic document that's part of the budget documents, it's all doom and gloom; it's all negative. We've got a government that has no vision, no plan and has eroded public trust and public confidence, and it's having an impact on the economy.

I talk to so many young families who are now considering moving away. We've spent years trying to give people a reason to move back to Newfoundland and Labrador, or to stay in Newfoundland and Labrador and to build a future here in Newfoundland and Labrador. To see that eroded by a lack of leadership and a lack of planning and a lack of vision is really, really disappointing because people deserve better.

When you look at the opportunities that do exist in Newfoundland and Labrador, it isn't all bad, it isn't all doom and gloom and we shouldn't have a government that simply stands over and over again to tell people how bad things are and how it is all doom and gloom. There are reasons to be hopeful.

With smart decisions, we can improve government, but we can also do things to create the right environment for economic growth. We can make the right kinds of investments in regions of this province to stimulate further growth and development. I believe all of that can be done. But unfortunately, through this budget and through this Throne Speech, we've heard very little of what's to come.

There were many omissions even in the Throne Speech, Mr. Speaker. We didn't see much

reference to the northern parts of our province. There was very little mention of Labrador. We didn't see anything related to the generic royalty regime. We didn't see any reference to Mistaken Point, which just achieved UNESCO status. We didn't see any specifics on inclusion, which I know is a huge issue in our education system. We didn't see any references – well, I shouldn't say any, but I don't recall any references to growing rural Newfoundland and Labrador. That was ignored through much of the Throne Speech.

There were references to aquaculture, but what about the fish processing sector? There have been lots of concerns expressed by people who make a living through our fishery in Newfoundland and Labrador, which is still a vibrant industry, and we heard very little about that sector in the Throne Speech or in the budget.

The government's commitment to social policy is really concerning, given the cuts that I talked about a little while ago. We figure there are more cuts coming, whether it's in our post-secondary institutions or in Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. We continue to hear government talking about doing better with less. That leaves a lot of questions, Mr. Speaker.

I see my time is up, so I look forward to having more opportunities during this budget debate to speak to the issues related to the budget, and to speak to the concerns that people have about this current government.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER (Osborne):** Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. JOYCE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm just going to stand, and I know it's short in the day, but, Mr. Speaker, you have got to help

me out here. When there's information put in this House of Assembly that is totally inaccurate, totally false, how can you describe it? We need to know. What the Member just talked about the hospital in Corner Brook is totally, absolutely false – absolutely false. And for the Member who was deputy premier on the backs of seniors who are looking for long-term care to stand in this hon. House and say they're going to start construction is absolutely false. What they had planned was to get a private company from BC, give them a piece of property over on the same site, give them the land, come in, set it up, you run it as a profit, tax the seniors as much as you like, cost as much as you like, make as much money as you like – that's what they planned.

For him to stand in this hon. House about something I've been advocating and I've been very passionate about, Mr. Speaker, you've got to help me, because what the Member is saying is absolutely, factually incorrect. I got a quote – I'll bring it in the House tomorrow – the same deputy premier and minister of Health stood up in 2014 and said the long-term care facility will start in Corner Brook this year. That was a press release.

The Leader of the Opposition, who was the minister of Health, stood up on two occasions and announced the hospital in Corner Brook. There were seven different announcements on the hospital in Corner Brook. For them to stand up here and say that we cancelled a long-term care, it's categorically, absolutely false, and they should not be trying to make political hay on the backs of seniors.

There are 42 in the hospital right now waiting for long-term care. They promised that since 2007, it hasn't been done, and played politics on the backs of those seniors who got to be shipped out of Corner Brook. It's absolutely unbelievable. It's shameful. That's the same minister, the same minister of Health, the deputy premier, who made the announcement in Corner Brook that construction was going to start, and it never started, Mr. Speaker. I can't stand here and listen to it, I can tell you.

He's over there laughing. I challenge any of them, let's go to Corner Brook and talk about how you were going to do the long-term care.

Let's go out and talk about it. I say to the Leader of the Opposition, the announcement you made that the hospital was going to start, let's go out and do it.

Do you know what the former premier had to do because they wouldn't do it? Members opposite – there are four of them there in the front that were in Cabinet, the three back weren't a part of it. The four that were in Cabinet, do you know what he had to do? He had to dismiss the minister of Health, the Member for Grand Falls-Windsor, to get her moved over there so he could get a study done to get radiation and CAT scan in Corner Brook, Mr. Speaker. That's what they had to do.

The leader, Tom Marshall, I've give him credit – you can look and say what you like; I'll show it to you. Tom Marshall had to get rid of Susan Sullivan. He had to do a study because the information that Tom Marshall was getting was absolutely false. I even gave Tom Marshall names and numbers of people in Nova Scotia to call.

I give Tom Marshall credit. Do you know what he did on a Saturday morning? He picked up the phone and he phoned this guy in Nova Scotia; it was in Cape Breton. He said: I'm Tom Marshall, the Premier of the province. He said I'm being told by the Department of Health, Susan Sullivan – the Members opposite also was part of it. They've been saying you can't run a single bunker unit. He said: We had it for 10 years. The demand is so much now, we have two.

Listen, you can shake your head that I'm being low. You don't know how many times the seniors expected the long-term care facility over there, let me tell you. If you don't believe me, you ask Tom Marshall.

I say to the Leader of the Opposition, you can look at me and say what you like; you made the commitment to the province, to the people of Corner Brook also, you made the commitment and you never fulfilled your commitment to the people of Corner Brook.

I say to the –

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I ask the Member to direct comments to the Speaker.

**MR. JOYCE:** Well, Mr. Speaker, can you tell the Leader of the Opposition what he did out there, making the commitments to the people of Corner Brook, breaking the promise for the home. I say to the deputy premier, the Member for Mount Pearl North, who's walking around to the back here now, listening to him talk to the backbenchers there, Mr. Speaker. I say to him: Why don't you talk about –

**MR. KENT:** Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

**MR. KENT:** I ask the Speaker if he's going to tolerate this kind of behaviour in our Legislature because it's completely inappropriate, Mr. Speaker. It's completely inappropriate. It's unparliamentary. It's not factual and it shows disrespect for the hon. House of Assembly.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

There is no point of order.

The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment.

**MR. JOYCE:** Mr. Speaker, there's no point of order and with this bunch, there was no hospital or long-term care either, let me tell you.

I say to the Leader of the Opposition, I know you stood up here –

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. JOYCE:** Here they go again.

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

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Mr. Speaker, under section 49 – and I hate to interrupt the Member opposite but, his behaviour under section 49, where he's using offensive words and disrespect for the House. I draw your attention to House of Commons practice and the orders under chapter 13 under page 618 where it refers to the use of

provocative language, among other things as well.

Provocative language refers to disrupting the House and creating that back and forth that's happening here. The Member's own actions here are soliciting a response from Members of the House which is contrary to the Rules of Order.

Mr. Speaker, I ask you to rule the minister out of order, ask him to address the Chamber appropriately and properly, and he abide by the rules that we follow here in this hon. House.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The hon. the Government House Leader.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** I don't have much time to address the point of order. The Member opposite references provocative language but failed to actually point out one single piece of provocative language.

Perhaps the Member forgets that we are in a Legislature where there is debate, and debate involves the cut and thrust and people speaking. So, again, I know he doesn't like the fact that the Member is reminding him of certain things, but there's absolutely nothing put forward right then that would constitute a Standing Order breach of any kind.

I would ask the Member to give me an opportunity to finish my point of order before he stands up. He's talking about being disrespectful. I'm actually standing up in the House and the Member opposite is standing right now and is refusing to let me finish my point. If he wants to talk about disrespectful, he's actually doing it right now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

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

Provocative language is described as describing something that's means to intend people to react

to it angrily or argue against it. That's exactly what's happening here now. That constitutes provocative language.

The minister stood today, he just referred to a former minister of the Crown who was off for a period of time on medical issues as well and making allegations against a former minister in a very disrespectful way, Mr. Speaker. I see no reason why the House should stand for such conduct by the Member opposite. I'm certainly not going to stand for it. It is contrary to the rules –

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. P. DAVIS:** – and I ask the minister to reflect on it.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

We have literally 30 seconds before –

**MR. JOYCE:** I have to say one thing, Mr. Speaker, and I'll –

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

I haven't yet recognized the minister.

**MR. JOYCE:** I have one thing –

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. JOYCE:** I understand words are touchy but I guarantee you –

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

Order, please!

I will seek guidance from the Government House Leaders. I'm going to shut this place down in a couple of seconds unless there's leave to continue on beyond the hour of 5:30.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** I'll leave it to the Member to adjourn and finish his speech tomorrow.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!



It's actually 5:30 at the moment. I'm asking guidance from the House Leaders, am I shutting this down now and we'll rule on this tomorrow or am I –

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Given the hour of the day, I move, seconded by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment, that the House do now adjourn. We'll get rulings tomorrow, if that's how this needs to go.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

According to the Standing Orders, it being 5:30, I take it that the debate is adjourned and we'll resume with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment tomorrow. I will rule tomorrow.

The House stands adjourned until 1:30 of the clock tomorrow afternoon.

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