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Speaker: Honourable Perry Trimper, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Trimper): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

In the public gallery today I would like to welcome Mr. Jim Crockwell, Ms. Nicole McDonald and Ms. Nehal Alsikh who will be mentioned in a Member's statement today.

A very big welcome to you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: Today we will hear Members' statements for the Districts of Baie Verte - Green Bay, Windsor Lake, Lewisporte - Twillingate, Fogo Island - Cape Freels and Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

The hon. Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay.

MR. WARR: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to acknowledge another successful year of play in the Central Senior Men's Recreation Hockey League. The league this year consisted of five teams representing the town of Exploits, Lewisporte, Twillingate and two teams from my district, Baie Verte and Springdale.

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to attend many of the games that were played in my district. The matches were well attended, the fans enjoyed the atmosphere and the level of play was spectacular. The players are all local to their respective areas and made for an exciting brand of hockey.

After winning the league championship the last two years, the Northeast Sabres from Baie Verte once again claimed first place in the regular season but fell short to their first round playoff opponents, the Twillingate Combines.

Springdale swept Exploits to set up a final against Twillingate.

In the spirit of competition, Mr. Speaker, discussions took place with the MHA from

Lewisporte - Twillingate and myself which led me to this statement.

Being a man of my word, I ask all hon. Members to join me in saluting the Twillingate Combines of the 2018 Central Men's Recreation Hockey League Champions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Windsor Lake.

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

I stand in this hon. House to recognize the amazing community associated with MacMorran Community Centre. The staff and volunteers worked with Ms. Nehal Alshikh from the Community Centre Alliance to host a very successful Multicultural Festival on March 22 of this year.

The centre was packed with neighbours and friends for an evening of sharing of cultures – from the salsa and belly dancers, the Henna station, and of course the wonderful Canadian and Ethnic Cuisine – all showcasing what makes the many cultures in the community worth sharing.

The community information kiosks, face painting and the wall of painted hands all illustrated the richness of this community and neighbours willingness to learn and share. The children, and adults, that attended the festival all left with large smiles and with an even deeper appreciation for the fabric of the community while building empathy for the horror that some members of that community have experienced in other countries.

Nehal said it best: "Sharing happiness is the best way to build a bridge between people."

The neighbours, volunteers, staff and all involved in MacMorran Community Centre in my district demonstrate every day values of compassion and understanding, an example for all of us, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. D. BENNETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And thank you to the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay for his kind words.

I rise in this hon. House to recognize the Lewisporte Senior Lynx male basketball team. After being granted a wild card berth to the provincial championships, the Senior Lynx brought their talents to the court, and dominated their opponents during round robin play, defeating Exploits Valley High, Elwood Collegiate and St. Kevin's High.

Semi-final action seen the Senior Lynx playing Templeton Academy, where they won with a score of 59-47. The final match was between two Central Newfoundland teams, as Lewisporte faced Gander Collegiate. With only a one point lead going into the fourth quarter, the Lynx came out with strong defence and great shooting, finishing with a 78-67 win.

The Senior Lynx teams is comprised of: Aaron Hayward, Reece Watton, Jordan Watkins, Phillip Pardy, Nolan Humphries, Dante Mills, Andrew Welsh, Joey Mews, Caleb Deering, Ian Wellon, Jonah Stead, Michael Hoffe, Brayden Hart, Michael Rideout and coaching staff were Ed Mitchell, John Walsh and Emma Mitchell.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members to join me in congratulating the Lewisporte Senior Lynx on winning the 3A provincial basketball championships.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Fogo Island - Cape Freels.

MR. BRAGG: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With this being volunteer appreciation week, I would like to relate a story of some outstanding volunteers. Last week, my district was experiencing extremely high destructive winds.

Wesley Collins's house was severely damaged. All his shingles on one side were completely blown off and scattered all over the ground.

Wesley is not in good health, and physically unable to get up on his roof to repair it. Moreover, he was not in a financial position to afford to purchase the new materials needed for such a project.

When word got out about Wesley's roof, people were very concerned and wanted to help. Within 24 hours, 11 men from Hare Bay and other surrounding towns came together to fix the problem. In addition, they took care of all the expenses at the local hardware store, so he wouldn't have any financial burden.

I would like to thank Randy, Lloyd, Ronald, Adam, Glen, Harvey, Todd, Gerald, Martin, Terry, Dwayne and everyone else involved in this project.

Wesley and his family are very humbled by this act of kindness, and hope these men realize how much they are appreciated. What they did will never be forgotten.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House to once again deliver accolades to my district's talented participants in this year's Central Newfoundland Kiwanis Music Festival. Thanks to our music instructors for their hard work and dedication that has supported and nurtured our many shining musical artists.

Today, I'd like to congratulate all the performers for their excellent results and throw a bouquet out to our 2018 award winners. The Cole Award went to the Bay d'Espoir Academy Triple Trio and the Howell Memorial Award was awarded to the St. Ignatius Children's Choir.

Jessica Willcott shone with the Cater Memorial Rose Bowl, Vocal Concert Group – 15 Years

and Over, Compositions by Canadian Composers and Concert Group, Concerto & Complete Major Solo Works – 12 Years and Over. Brianna Hoskins was awarded the Traditional Folk Song – 14 Years and Under, and Paige John won the award for Sacred Music – 15 Years and Over.

Congratulations also to the Bay d'Espoir Academy High choir, recipient of the coveted Adjudicator Award. Hats off to all the performers who absolutely shone at the festival.

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. Thank you for sharing your amazing gift of music.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure to rise in the House today to celebrate and recognize the tireless work of our province's volunteers. National Volunteer Week runs from April 15 to 21 and it is a time to thank the volunteers in our province for their contributions to our communities.

From the dedicated people who help our seniors to those working to welcome newcomers from other countries, volunteers are essential to the province's continued social, cultural and economic development.

Some volunteers, including firefighters and search and rescue teams, work in difficult and precarious circumstances, often helping others in what might be their darkest hours.

In *Budget 2018*, we introduced a Search and Rescue Volunteer Tax Credit that will allow eligible volunteers to claim a \$3,000 non-refundable provincial income tax credit starting January 1, 2019. Our government will always

seek opportunities to support those who spend their time supporting others.

Mr. Speaker, it is extraordinary that in our busy world so many people are still willing to give so freely of their time. Volunteer Week is when we say thank you to those who contribute and to celebrate the value of volunteering. I, along with my hon. colleagues, thank them for their efforts.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. On behalf of the Official Opposition caucus, I join with the minister in recognizing National Volunteer Week and thank the thousands of volunteers who work tirelessly to support our organizations in our communities all over our great province.

In this province, we are fortunate to have volunteers who give their time to operate all kinds of community organizations, school councils, recreation committees, coaches, services for children and families, those who serve as volunteer firefighters and on search and rescue teams and the list goes on.

The minister spoke about a Search and Rescue Volunteer Tax Credit that does recognize the commitment and dedication of our search and rescue volunteers and the unselfish giving of their time supported by their families. I recognize the many volunteers in this province and encourage them to continue serving our communities as they are the fabric which binds our community and regions. Only through their efforts are we the great Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement and join with him in celebrating the work of the province's legions of volunteers. Truly, volunteers are the backbone of the community.

There are few organizations or municipalities who could function without their volunteers. Their contribution to social, cultural and economic development is incalculable. Volunteers keep this province going.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, to increase exposure to coding and participation in youth technology experience programs, the provincial government announced \$250,000 to support a partnership with Brilliant Labs for students in our schools with hands-on participation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics-focused activities.

In addition to this new funding, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is providing \$150,000 aimed specifically at professional learning and resources for schools, and the provision of two itinerant teaching units to support Brilliant Labs work.

Mr. Speaker, Brilliant Labs is an Atlantic Canadian organization that supports coding, computational thinking and Maker Education in schools. This funding will assist Brilliant Labs to provide educational technologies in Newfoundland and Labrador such as interface equipment, sensors, programming languages and 3-D printing. A long-term goal of Brilliant Labs is to engage more partners to reach up to 45,000 students and more than 5,000 educators.

The provincial government is committed to the advancement of technology in the classroom. This partnership will give our students an opportunity to reach their full potential – to become innovators, educators, researchers and

leaders. We want to develop creative problem solvers and entrepreneurs who continue to drive innovative, leading-edge technology and make Newfoundland and Labrador a world leader and a place to invest.

Mr. Speaker, this partnership aligns with key initiatives of *The Way Forward*, such as the Premier's Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes, the recently released Technology Sector Work Plan and the Business Innovation Agenda.

During yesterday's coding announcement at Elizabeth Park Elementary, myself and the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation, witnessed students putting coding principles into action through a classroom demonstration. Seeing these young people embrace new technology, and seeing that experience position them for success in the future, all speaks to how our government is Building for Our Future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. The announcement that coding and technology will play a greater role in our education curriculum is something that we are interested in learning more about. I'm also interested in learning more about the partnership with Brilliant Labs.

Automation is one of the most prevalent factors that are cited to change the landscape of the future economy. Many other jurisdictions have taken note of this trend and have implemented coding curriculum for many years now with very positive results. Providing our youth with a brighter future and the tools that will lead them to greater opportunities is always a good thing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of 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. I'm pleased the department is investing directly to expand coding and technology instruction in schools, something I have long supported. In 2014, I stood in this House with a petition calling for more computer science courses and coding instruction in schools.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. MICHAEL: Our students need computer literacy for their future employment and for our economy. I hope this instruction, Mr. Speaker, will be universally available to all students.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, as announced on April 5, applications are now being accepted for Summer Student Employment Programs.

Budget 2018 provides \$6.1 million to support youth employment and career-related activities, helping youth build a brighter future right here at home. Included in this is funding for two Summer Student Employment Programs, one for high school students and another for post-secondary students.

These programs enable young Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to learn and develop new skills while making important connections with the local business community.

Applications for post-secondary students must be received by May 7. I am pleased to inform my hon. colleagues that the wage subsidy for private sector employers hiring post-secondary students has been raised to \$5.60 per hour from the original \$5 per hour.

Applications for high school students must be received by May 22.

This year we are again partnering with the Community Sector Council of Newfoundland and Labrador to offer the AMPLIFY program, Assisting My Potential - Labour Market Initiative for Youth. Launched last year as a pilot program, AMPLIFY helped young youth gain work experience and participate in career development and personal growth activities.

Through the Cabinet Committee on Jobs, we also continue to work with industry partners to expand the oil and gas, the agriculture, the aquaculture and technology sectors by supporting career-development opportunities for youth. As part of *The Way Forward*, we partnered with these industries to promote economic growth and job creation, and a key part of that work is exposing young people to opportunities they can use to build their futures.

Budget 2018 provides \$196,000 for a new Student Mentorship Program, which is supported by federal funding, and will provide 25 youth with work experience in each of these high-growth sectors for a total of 100 jobs. We are finalizing the details of this new program and I anticipate inviting applications in the very near future.

I ask all hon. colleagues to join me in encouraging employers and not-for-profit organizations throughout the province to participate in these programs, helping build the province's future workforce.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. The Summer Student Employment Program is very important, as it provides young people with the skills and abilities they will need for their future. It's a great networking exercise and overall positive experience for students. It's also a great benefit that this program provides to employers and especially to non-profit organizations. There are untold mutual benefits that the program provides.

I encourage all high school and post-secondary students who are interested to apply for this program and I wish them nothing but the best in their future.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. I'm pleased to join with him in encouraging employers, business or not-for-profit, to get involved in this program and hire a student. Students bring energy and enthusiasm to the workplace and get much needed on-the-job experience and some cash in return.

I also look forward to government developing a workable job strategy so these young people will be able to find meaningful employment waiting for them in this province when they get ready for fulltime employment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it's been one year since the appointment of the Cabinet Committee on Jobs and the Premier's promise of 14,000 person-years of employment annually.

I ask the Premier: How many jobs have been created over the past year?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well as the Member opposite has mentioned about the Cabinet Committee on Jobs, it was a priority for us, job creation in our province, there's no doubt. We've seen unemployment numbers rise in Newfoundland and Labrador, primarily because of the finalization of three megaprojects that we've seen in our province, Mr. Speaker.

So the exact number per position that has been created in agriculture, Mr. Speaker, I can't give you that exact number today. I will tell you, there are many people looking at the agricultural industry and that area for future jobs, employment. We've met with tech sector. We saw hundreds of people that stood up, less than 30 years old, interested in working in Newfoundland and Labrador, already finding jobs here. Investments that we made in industries like Provincial Airlines creating jobs, some 150 that have been added to the investment we've made with them.

I can't give you the exact number, but I can tell you what, we are creating jobs for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, instead of creating the environment to promote jobs, the Liberal's own budget document shows that jobs are disappearing. From 2016-2022, 17,800 jobs will vanish – that's according to your own documents.

Premier: Are you still creating the economic environment to meet the projected job creation that your government has laid out?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker, we're creating the environment. As a matter of fact, we fixed a lot of tough environments that the Members opposite have left Newfoundlanders and Labradorians – not just this government, but Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and that was very clear, Mr. Speaker.

With our *Way Forward* in 2016, it was primarily focused on job creation. That is the reason why we put in the Cabinet Committee on Jobs. We are meeting sector by sector. We've already had meetings with aquaculture. We're seeing significant investments come in to our province. I mentioned earlier about agriculture. We've seen it with forestry, mining, tech sector. The list goes on and on.

We are committed to creating a better environment. *Advance 2030* is another good example of making investments with industry, Mr. Speaker, to create employment for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize that economic diversification is the future for job creation, not just ...

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier needs to read *Budget 2018: The Economy*, his own documentation on the economic indicators for the province, Mr. Speaker. Unemployment continues to rise based on that document. Budget documents show the general unemployment rate will be over 15 per cent by 2019.

Based on your own information, how can your so-called *Way Forward* strategy even been working?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, I've read our budget, Mr. Speaker, and we put in place a very good forecast for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. A seven-year forecast will get this province back to surplus. Mr. Speaker, it was a seven-year journey that we put in place in 2016 based on what we were left with in 2015.

Now the Member opposite talks about looking at economic indicators, so I would encourage him not to play politics with this but look at his own budget that he was part of in 2015. Look at the economic indicators that he put out there to the people in this province, Mr. Speaker. I will tell you, we have turned many of the bad economic indicators that they posted in 2015. There's a lot of work being done. There's a lot more work being done, but I can tell you this province will continue to work.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I encourage the Premier to go back and look at the economic indicators with our 10 years or 12 years of power and compare them to his. Do that any day, have a look.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HUTCHINGS: Have a look, I'll say to the Premier. Take a look.

Mr. Speaker, the seven-year plan he refers to, the seven-year plan; Moody's and other banking institutes have looked at that and they don't share the optimism that he does and neither does the AG in 2017, I say to the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. HUTCHINGS: Premier, your *Way Forward* on aquaculture states you will generate 1,100 person-hours of employment based on your aquaculture growth targets, yet aquaculture production and value actually declined in the province last year.

Can you tell us how you plan to meet those job targets you promised in that particular sector?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, (inaudible) the Member opposite just go with a preamble when he talked about comparing the last 12 years, from 2003 to 2015, to where we are now.

Mr. Speaker, their government that they refuse to even talk about had nearly 35 per cent, 36 per cent of the revenue coming from oil and they forgot this – Mr. Speaker, I would say they got a little lazy, to be honest with you, when you look at economic diversification, where you would make investments to create jobs for the future for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. What they did was some-\$25 billion over the 10-year period that they had an unprecedented number – no other government in the history of this province which saw that kind of money coming in.

Mr. Speaker, we should not be in this position. I will tell you, their legacy is higher electricity rates and Muskrat Falls.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: Mr. Speaker, people were a lot happier in the last decade than what they have been in the last two years.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. PERRY: In budget '16, grants in the Disability Policy Office were cut by \$150,000. In budget '17, another \$50,000 was cut, and in this year's recent budget another \$75,000 in funding was removed.

I ask the minister: Why do you feel it is necessary to cut disability grants by \$275,000 since coming into office?

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

MS. DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, there are not a lot of things that leaves me speechless, but day after day when we come in this House and they ask us what we're doing and talk about increased taxes and things like that – and seem to have complete amnesia about the mismanagement for the decade they were in power.

Mr. Speaker, in the Disability Policy Office we are doing wonderful things for that group of people, given the fiscal situation that we are in. We have things like the Accessible Vehicle Funding Program, 350,000; the Accessible Taxi Program that we give out \$50,000 to a number of businesses around the province. We hear back all the time about the wonderful benefits of that.

Mr. Speaker, right now we are currently looking at a full new act around the disabilities piece, engaging with stakeholders. Stay tuned for more information.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

MS. PERRY: Minister, you've cut almost \$300,000 from inclusion grants, accessible transportation programs and capacity grants. What do you say to those individuals and community partners who are looking for funding, but cannot receive it because the Liberal government does not consider it a priority?

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

MS. DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, we are investing more than \$2 million into capacity, we are investing more than \$1 million into capacity grants and I could go on and on. What I will say is we have a plan in *The Way Forward* that we

are following. We will not see another decade of mismanagement that's on the backs of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in this province like we've seen in the last decade, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

MS. PERRY: So far *The Way Forward* has taken us 10 steps backwards.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. PERRY: In March, the minister was quick to thank MusicNL for bringing CBC's Studio F back to life; however, yesterday he said that the partnership has nothing to do with the provincial government.

I ask the minister: Do you support the partnership with MusicNL in the funding of CBC's Studio F?

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Mr. Speaker, the question that's being asked is something that is with an industry association that is completely independent of government and a public broadcaster. She may want to ask the co-chair of MusicNL, Mr. Davis, about this particular partnership and how they've entered into with the public broadcaster.

When it comes to supporting and advancing the music industry and any partnership that will see the music industry in Newfoundland and Labrador create jobs, create opportunities for export and development and allow for musicians and others to progress, we certainly support that, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: I remind all Members that this is called Oral Questions. I want to hear the

questions and I want to hear the answers. I will not tolerate interruptions of either.

Please continue.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. LESTER: Mr. Speaker, the current Liberal government has committed a massive handout of \$40 million worth of tax breaks to Canopy Growth, a Mainland marijuana company.

I ask the minister: Will there be any additional financial commitments to this company?

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When it comes to the supply of cannabis for Newfoundland and Labrador, once cannabis becomes legal by the federal government and their policy shift, all provinces and territories must ensure adequate supply. So for Newfoundland and Labrador, given that we have no licensed suppliers here in the province, we had to ensure that we secure a source of supply, and we entered into an agreement with Canopy, which is going to lead to 145 jobs right here in this province for 20 years.

When the Member opposite, the House Leader had asked about what are some of the things that we're doing for job creation, this is something that's leading to job creation. There's also going to be R & D investment and the company is going to be putting in up to \$55 million when it comes to investment here. We're not providing financial dollars to the company.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LESTER: Mr. Speaker, I would like this question addressed: Will Canopy Growth, after being given \$40 million of Newfoundland taxpayers' money, be able to compete with local industry to apply for additional money for any of the province's agricultural grants or subsidies?

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: I must clear the record, Mr. Speaker, to the Member opposite because there are no tax dollars going into Canopy Growth company. This is a deal that's being put into place that's going to lead to 145 jobs for the province, the company is going to make an investment and they can recoup partial investment through sales rebates that's made right here in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Now, the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources has been very clear that cannabis operations would not be eligible for grants under the programs that exist in their department.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LESTER: I do understand that it's not actually a handout of \$40 million but –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. LESTER: If we're forgoing income on the future of tax breaks, that is a liability that we are bestowing on the people of this province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LESTER: We're months away from the legalization of weed in St. John's and a retail store downtown is already running a contest for its customers stating: win free weed for a year. Apparently, they're convinced that they will be getting a licence from government.

Can the minister confirm?

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When it comes to the Canopy Growth deal itself, one of the important things – and I'm very pleased that the Member opposite recognizes now that there are not tax dollars going into this operation, as they've been misreporting time and time again. Actually, what's going to happen with the Canopy deal itself, we're going to see tens of millions of dollars returned to the province through job numbers, through salary dollars, through taxation that is going to lead to economic development and diversification.

The NLC, as well, has just entered into a request for information to look at other supply opportunities for other suppliers across Newfoundland and Labrador. We see where there are a lot of people who are interested in supply, and that we will be ready in Newfoundland and Labrador.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LESTER: I ask the minister: Wouldn't marijuana stores be held to the same standards employed around the sale of alcohol? Would a government-approved marijuana store be permitted to give away a year's worth of free weed to a customer, recognizing that NLC cannot do so with alcohol?

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When it comes to compliance of what is permissible and what is not, we will certainly be looking into any particular matter. If something is not within the realm of the law or the regulations, certainly the Minister of Justice, through the NLC who is actually going to be dealing with the retail of cannabis here in this province, they will certainly use their enforcement officers and ensure compliance, as all retailers are ensured to do when it comes to the sale of alcohol.

We take this matter very seriously as a province when it comes to compliance here in Newfoundland and Labrador and we certainly will with cannabis as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LESTER: Considering that we're less than three months away, I'm pretty sure we should have these details finalized by now.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LESTER: In Estimates last night, we heard that there is no additional support for the Mistaken Point UNESCO site, despite the fact that there are mandated requirements under the UNESCO management plan to be met to maintain our UNESCO status. And there are tremendous economic opportunities for the Southern Avalon.

This is our only provincially UNESCO managed site. Why is there a lack of support for this project?

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

MR. BYRNE: Oh no, Mr. Speaker, there's no lack of provincial support for this particular site. In fact, we are very keen on developing Mistaken Point within the structure and the guidelines of the application that was brought forward by their administration, the former administration. Which reflected on the fact that this is a very, very special site, a very important conservation location that needs to be protected while at the same time opportunities promoted to be able to encourage visitation.

Mr. Speaker, we're working now with local community groups, with assembling an advisory committee. We're working on a fee structure which we spoke about last night in Estimates.

Before I sit down, I do want to take an opportunity to thank the hon. Members opposite for a fantastic Estimates session last night. We really did get a lot of information on the floor of the House of Assembly.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. LESTER: I'd also like to express my gratitude to the Member opposite.

Mr. Speaker, the Mistaken Point Cape Race Heritage is a volunteer organization that operates the interpretation centre in Portugal Cove South, the gateway for tourists from around the world to visit this site. This group wrote the minister last November looking for help and were never responded to.

Is this acceptable for volunteers who support the only provincially managed UNESCO site, bearing in mind that this site will be open to the public in less than four weeks?

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

MR. BYRNE: Mr. Speaker, our protected areas – we have been in communication with the various stakeholder groups. Yes, there are several issues that need to be resolved – such as the advisory committee, such as the fee structure – to be able to adequately maintain the facilities, promote the facilities and care for the facilities. I do want to say how much I appreciate.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member opposite gives me a wonderful opportunity to stand on my feet and express how this government is supporting tourism and our protected areas. We are doing a fantastic job. I appreciate the hon. Member for his support for all that we do in this House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. LESTER: Mr. Speaker, this site is provincially managed and, once again, four weeks from opening its doors and it's still without a stable financial plan. This organization

has run deficits in the last two years struggling to operate the UNESCO site gateway.

In *Budget 2016* your government decided that you were going to charge a fee for entrance and put it into general revenues with no commitment to provide additional support for this site. We cannot use this UNESCO site as a cash cow; this is something we need to develop as a business.

Is this still the plan for 2018?

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

MR. BYRNE: Mr. Speaker, we value this site and we are working with the stakeholders to ensure the site is not only protected, but visitation is enhanced. That we ensure the opportunity for not only local members of the community to manage and to promote its conservation, but also to promote visitation to the site is indeed encouraged.

MR. JOYCE: (Inaudible.)

MR. BYRNE: And as the hon. member, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment points out, those 16 years of age and under are admitted free of charge.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BYRNE: Now, Mr. Speaker, that's promoting our young people to take advantage of all that Newfoundland and Labrador, our tremendous natural heritage, that –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please.

MR. BYRNE: – all of our young people can take advantage of.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LESTER: I do appreciate the preliminary discussions and plans, but last year, Mr. Speaker, volunteers at the interpretation centre had to sell raffle tickets, keep a donation jar on

the counter, just to keep the centre open. Again last week, in light of unsustainable funds, the volunteers had to put off a supper to try and raise the money to operate this season.

Minister, do you think this is acceptable for a provincially managed, globally recognized, UNESCO Heritage Site, and how does this action align with our province's tourism plan?

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

MR. BYRNE: So, Mr. Speaker, there are two different entities that are involved here. One is the interpretation centre. One is the (inaudible) organization on the ground in the community itself. There is provincial funding that is going to this site, but I will point out a very important point, fact.

When the previous administration submitted the plan, there was very little foundation that was laid above and beyond what we installed, what we put in place. Yes, we are working with the advisory committees. We are establishing an advisory committee. We're working with the local community groups to ensure that the facility is not only well run but well financed. They would like to establish a fee structure themselves. They want to complement it with any provincial fee structure so that there's an adequate revenue stream.

Mr. Speaker, Mistaken Point, make no mistake, will continue to be a treasure for Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LESTER: I'm still confused. I can't see where the breakdown is. We're four weeks away from opening the doors and they still don't know if they're going to be able to turn the lights on, or keep the lights on. In order for United Nations status for World Heritage designation to be maintained, specific requirements are to be met under an approved management plan.

Can you assure that all measures are up to date and that the designation is not in question?

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

MR. BYRNE: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we can assure that. In fact, we'll be hiring soon – not only students to be able to ensure the facility is properly maintained over the summer months, a wonderful opportunity for students – but we have staff on site. We'll make sure this site is operating properly, and we do recognize it does require provincial investment and we are prepared to make that investment.

I will remind the hon. Member opposite, he may want to look to the front bench of his own caucus, his own colleagues, because the Member for Ferryland was just on promoting and insisting that programs and services of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador supplied by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador must be cut. He should ask the Member for Ferryland what he meant by that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In 2018, the federal government will further burden and stifle the Newfoundland economy with a carbon tax that all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians will have to pay. Again, instead of standing up for our province the government has agreed to go along with their federal cousins as per normal.

I ask the Minister of Environment: in the first year of the \$20 a ton carbon tax, what reduction in greenhouse gas in Newfoundland are you predicting?

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

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member for his question.

I'm just glad that he finally realizes it's a federal tax that's imposed upon all the provinces in Canada because the press release he sent out earlier said how we agreed to it and we went out and we could have fought against it. So I'm just glad the Member has finally read the material and finally has his facts straight.

I'll say to the Member opposite, it don't start until January 1, 2019. Mr. Speaker, we will be releasing the carbon plan very soon in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador for everybody to see.

Mr. Speaker, I made no bones about it, I said it publicly on many occasions, that before January 1, 2019, we will be releasing the carbon plan and it will be out for public view. I'm sure ...

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Surely the Minister of Environment for Newfoundland, you should know the answer to this question. What you answered then was nothing.

So I ask the minister again: What reduction in greenhouse gas emissions do you expect with your carbon tax?

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

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, again, to the Member opposite, I have to say your carbon tax: Muskrat Falls. The largest tax that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians will ever see in this province is Muskrat Falls. People say you're always bringing up Muskrat Falls. I got to bring it up, Mr. Speaker, because that's going to be hurting Newfoundlanders and Labradorians until everyone in this House is not even here anymore. That's the sad part.

What we can say, though, Mr. Speaker, about the carbon tax is that the federal government informed us here's what you have to do. We will do it. If not, they will step in. The formula that

we're going to put in place, Mr. Speaker, will be made in Newfoundland and Labrador. And when the carbon tax comes in, we will have the gas tax, the rest of the gas tax (inaudible) –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South for a quick question, please.

MR. PETTEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Obviously another new tactic to note: no details, no idea.

Minister, can you release your assessment on what the average family in Newfoundland and Labrador with two small children will pay in extra costs for food, clothing and other necessities as a result of the trickle-down effect of the carbon tax?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and the Environment for a quick response, please.

MR. JOYCE: As I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, if the Member wants to listen –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, if the Member wants to listen to it, as I said, I will release the carbon tax all throughout the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. I can tell you one thing, when I release the plan for the carbon tax, it's going to be a lot more than the three sentences that he was a part of when he was executive assistant to the minister of Transportation in the Humber Valley Paving that stuck a lot of people with money.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday I asked the Premier, after 2½ years of him at the helm of the province, why is real unemployment increasing to an expected 20 per

cent and rising. We all knew the three megaprojects would be winding down. That was not an unexpected surprise.

So I ask the Premier again: What does he expect the unemployment rate and the job rates to be in 2020?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I did answer the Member opposite about the high unemployment rates in our province and where we go back to similar numbers of where we were in 2009-2010 time frames, Mr. Speaker. We're not happy with that. We want to put people to work in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I'll just remind people about a comment that I made yesterday about how you track investment into Newfoundland and Labrador. I'm not suggesting that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that work in Alberta is the answer – it's not. We want to attract investment to Newfoundland and Labrador. But her federal party and her two colleagues in British Columbia and Alberta, they seem to be having a squabble how you attract investment. So I'd be curious to know, where would you stand on investments like you saw in BC in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, we are doing our job to attract investment in Newfoundland and Labrador, working with every single industry sector.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the Premier knows what's happening across Canada. Let's talk about what's happening here in the lives of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. ROGERS: So I ask the Premier once again: What assurances can he give our young people and families who want to stay and live

here that there will be work for them here in Newfoundland and Labrador? Perhaps today he can focus on answering that question.

Can he please tell them, from his knowledge and the work that his government has done, what does the immediate and short-term future of work here in the province look like for them?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've been working very closely, as I said, with a number of industry sectors; one of which would be the aquaculture industry and making investments into infrastructure in our province as well. Much of the investments that we've seen we take opposition from people like the NDP, and now including the new Leader of the NDP who does not see a future in aquaculture in rural communities in Newfoundland and Labrador. Mr. Speaker, she's quite openly, on many occasions, spoken out against that.

We have our federal colleagues right now that, in some cases, take exception to what's happening to offshore Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker. In some ways, I get confused on where she actually stands because we've never seen a solution of where we should be investing to create jobs.

We are working with every single industry sector in the province (inaudible) –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

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

The much-touted new federal funding for child care is just throwing money at a patchwork system, leaving most parents without access to affordable, quality child care. The province continues to buy in to the subsidy mentality.

I ask the Minister of Finance why the new eligibility cap for the subsidy is so low at \$35,000, still excluding families just above the poverty line who can't afford \$800 a month.

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, we have done quite a bit since taking office on the early learning and care file. We started out by implementing full-day kindergarten, which the Member opposed here in the House of Assembly. We have improved the lot of early childhood educators by increasing the supplement that they receive not once, but twice. We have increased the cap to enable more families to avail of the full subsidy, but it's a sliding scale so it's somewhat inaccurate to suggest anybody else wouldn't get anything.

We are improving the Operating Grant Program to make child care more affordable, with the assistance of the \$22 million agreement that we signed with the federal government. We have done quite a lot more on this file than any government previously.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

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

I point out to the minister that full-day kindergarten is not child care.

When will he make child care truly affordable by bringing it into the public education system and early childhood development system for children of all ages?

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, I didn't say that it was child care, full-day kindergarten. I said early learning and care. Early learning and care is a continuum from the time a child enters regulated child care to the time that a child really goes through primary school. That is the continuum

of early learning and care. The earliest time that a child enters regulated child care to the time that a child leaves primary school.

That's just my definition and way of putting it. It's all a continuum and part of the transformation of the education system that we are seeing and that we are presiding over. The next step in that is early reading intervention for kindergarten to grade six, and every teacher I talked to is quite excited to get to the next step of this.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The time for Oral Questions has ended.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Tabling of Documents

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

MS. COADY: Mr. Speaker, in accordance with the *Energy Corporation Act* and the *Hydro Corporation Act* it's my pleasure to table the 2017 Business and Financial Report for Nalcor Energy, as well as the 2017 Consolidated Financial Statements of Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Further tabling of documents?

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

MR. LESTER: Mr. Speaker, I have been once again given the honour to be the voice of the people of Port Blandford. I, therefore, present these reasons for this petition:

Port Blandford and surrounding region's economy is reliant on tourism and related outdoor activities. The forest in and around Port Blandford contributes heavily to a thriving tourism industry, employing many residents in the town.

The forests in and around Port Blandford sustains a large wildlife population, including the once endangered and now threatened species, the Newfoundland marten. The council and residents of the community were not properly consulted before important decisions were made.

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly to call upon government to immediately cancel any plans for clear-cutting in the Port Blandford area, as identified in the five-year plan; and furthermore, before any current or future decisions are made concerning wood harvesting in our region, to direct the department to ensure that appropriate consultations are conducted with active involvement from the municipal council and an opportunity for its residents to be engaged.

I, therefore, as a Member of the House of Assembly, respectfully ask the minister to address these concerns in a timely fashion.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment for a response, please.

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Member for the petition, but we have to set the record, because as Minister of Municipal Affairs and Environment, Mr. Speaker, I want to make it quite clear. If you sit down with the minister and if there are any changes to it, it's done in good faith.

I have to say, in the email that was sent, Mr. Speaker, the email from Mr. Bennett, I think it was January 12, 2017, he clearly states: after the

meeting Tuesday night and we met with the Department of Forestry and Agrifoods about our concerns, that now we approve what was put forth.

I know the mayor quite well. We have a great relationship with the mayor. When we made the announcement out in Clarenville, the mayor thought the best relationship we ever had. The first time they ever got funding. So I know the department is open to sit down and have a very serious conversation with the town, with the group.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot let it stand to say that this was pushed, because the information shows the council had concerns. These people went and met with officials and came back and said: after meeting with the officials, now we agree with the plan.

On January 12, 2017, it was sent in from Mr. Bennett to the Department of Environment to release this because they agreed with what was in the plan. At least seven times, or eight times, I'm not sure of the exact number, there were words "clear-cutting" in it.

So let's sit down and have a sensible conversation over this, Mr. Speaker, but it was done according to all regulations and with consultation.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Thank you.

Further petitions?

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

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

(Inaudible) reasons for this petition on universal public child care. Our licenced child care system is a patchwork of private for-profit centres – 70 per cent of all centres – non-profit community-based centres and family daycare, plus a small number of education and workplace-based centres. It is nowhere near meeting the child care needs in our province. Affordable licenced child care is often in short supply in rural parts of the

province. Even in St. John's there are long wait-lists for quality child care programs.

Child care programs have both social and financial benefits for society. Studies show that high-quality child care and early childhood education programs result in better cognitive, language and numeracy skills. They help economically disadvantaged children transition to school on the same level as other children. For every one dollar spent on early childhood education, the benefits range from \$1.50 to \$2.78.

Investing in child care creates jobs. One million dollars invested in child care would create 40 jobs, more than in any other sector. A gender-based analysis of the provincial budget would have indicated the need for a public child care program as a key way to close the wage gap between women and men in this province.

THEREFORE we the undersigned, petition the House of Assembly as follows:

We call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to take immediate steps to put in place a plan for a gradual transition to a universal, regulated and publicly funded and fully accessible child care and after school care program.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to point out that what these petitioners are saying has also been echoed by people such as the Bank of Canada. The Bank of Canada has highlighted a child care program for raising prime-aged female workforce participation from 74 per cent 20 years ago to about 87 per cent today. In comparison, he said about 83 per cent of prime-aged women participate in the national workplace because of that. He's talking about Quebec, where Quebec turned things around for women, and by turning things around for women, turned things around for their economy.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Further petitions?

The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

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

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

WHEREAS the fishery policy regulations links harvesting quotas to vessels length for certain species; and

WHEREAS many harvesters own vessels of various sizes but because of policy and regulations are restricted to using smaller vessels and often putting their crews into danger;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the government to make representation to the federal government to encourage them to change the policy and ensure safety to fish harvesters in this province.

Mr. Speaker, this is a petition I've been bringing up several times. Every time I come to the House, and it hits home to me. I have family members that are on the water with different vessels also.

When you look in the North Atlantic and look at some of the times – especially the last couple of weeks. I know there's some boats gone today. When I came through my community of Flatrock this morning it amazed me to know they were gone because there was a swell on like you wouldn't believe and outside it seemed like it was pretty rough, but to know they're gone out there in vessels to catch the inshore crab.

What I'm talking about, especially in the crab fishery, there are three different zones and they're all based on different size vessels. Now I don't think it's much of a difference whether you're nine miles off or you're 50 miles off or you're 200 miles off. Once you go offshore five or six miles you're in rough water, no matter what the conditions are.

I believe regulations can change, and I understand why the regulations came in in the first of it. Because when we went to a shell fishery, and the crab fishery in particular, the inshore fisheries had smaller boats. It was a point to make sure they weren't shoved aside

because they needed a bigger vessel. They gave them a zone that they could fish in.

Now that the fishery has expanded and most people do have larger vessels and fish three different zones, the regulations should be looked at because the safety of our harvesters – and it's too often we hear in Newfoundland and Labrador about people getting lost at sea and drowned at sea and stuff like this.

This is a regulation that Ottawa is making. It should be made here in Newfoundland and Labrador and say, listen here, conditions here in our province are very rough areas where people have to go. There's no reason they should be using boats under 35-feet long to be in these conditions.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Further petitions?

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes, thank you.

I call 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, the Budget Speech.

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

MR. BROWNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's certainly a pleasure to stand here in the Chamber to bring some of my remarks in response to the budget. I first wish to congratulate my colleague from St. John's Centre on becoming the new Leader of the NDP. Congratulations, I say to my colleague. I certainly look forward to a spirited debate as always here in the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, I was listening to some of the commentary back and forth in Question Period. It was getting quite exciting, actually, today. The topic was jobs. Jobs are so important to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, particularly to young people. I can guarantee Members opposite that the young people of this province want to stay home. We want to live here. We want to work here. We want to raise our families here, which is exactly why the Premier constituted the Cabinet Committee on Jobs.

If you're asking for a jobs plan, I say to Members opposite, I can tell you one thing: We won't be aiding a foreign government with their jobs plan in Romania like Members opposite did. We won't be shipping hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of jobs that could have been down in Marystown, Mr. Speaker, building ferries, off to Romania and then forgetting that there would be tariffs applied – forgot \$50 million worth of tariffs.

In most societies, this would be considered fiction. You couldn't imagine that a government would not only ship work overseas, but then forget about the tariffs that would be applied, Mr. Speaker, based on the premise that BC had a ferry that was sunk out there and they got their tariffs relieved. It's a totally different story.

It could have been built in Marystown. There could have been jobs in Marystown, but yet again – yet again – the people of the Burin Peninsula were forgotten about, were ignored, just like they were when the FPI plant was crumbled to the ground, like the High Liner plant in Burin was left to be shuttered their doors on, like the mine in St. Lawrence (inaudible) hung around and hung around – the cut that many ribbons they couldn't find ne'er ribbon to cut on it there last year.

So we're taking things over the finish line. We're committed to ensuring the jobs are created that are meaningful and sustainable, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BROWNE: Before we broke for Easter, Mr. Speaker, I gave a speech here in the Legislature with respect to aquaculture. I

challenged the then contender for the NDP leadership, the Member for St. John's Centre, to come to the Burin Peninsula and explain and put her position on the table to the people with respect to aquaculture.

To the best of my knowledge, that's still not happened. I live on the Burin Peninsula. I never saw the Member down. The invitation is still there and the people expect it. We should all put our positions on the table, rather than pontificating in Question Period about where the jobs plan are. We have a viable means to create jobs in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, but Members opposite are set on seeing it delayed, if not stopped entirely.

So I just have to highlight some facts, Mr. Speaker. We have created the Cabinet Committee on Jobs. We have so far hosted three industry summits where we've had people all around the table, from industry. We've had action plans in place. Whether it's in aquaculture, agriculture or technology, the people around the table, the industry associations, the operators, the entrepreneurs are applauding these efforts. Saying they've never seen government engaged in a laser-focused way on promoting economic growth and economic sustainability as they've seen through this process. I am certain that there will be more to come.

We look at tourism, Mr. Speaker. We just attended the largest Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador Conference in their history. We're almost up to 20,000 people employed in the industry, up from 18,000. Last year, we had a total tourism spending of \$1.13 billion. And not only that – and this is a very important fact – non-resident visitors, we had over 550,000, the highest non-resident visitation and spending here in the province last year.

Twenty thousand jobs, Mr. Speaker, but apparently there are no jobs plan. There are no jobs in the province. All the young people leaving. This negativity it gets tiring. I mean, the Members opposite must be so tired, because I'm tired of listening to the negativity. We all need to be positive. We all need to recognize there are challenges, no doubt, but collectively work together to solve them.

We have a lot going on, Mr. Speaker, and in terms of this year's budget it continues our plan to bring this province back from the brink of bankruptcy, which the former administration left us. So I always say when I stand and we discuss budgetary matters, it's important to note and notice where we were, where we are and where we are going.

When I shook hands with people in the last election, knocked on their doors, shook hands with them, I did in the good faith that I believe the numbers that they published. Mr. Speaker, so clearly mistaken that I was, and the people in the province were when we were told there was a \$1.1 billion deficit, it was actually a \$2.7 billion deficit. Very, very unfortunate that is the state of the fiscal reality that we were left with.

So we've taken a measured approach over a seven-year period to return to surplus. I commend the minister, I commend the former minister, for this plan and we are continuing on that, Mr. Speaker, but there are some very good investments in terms of economic growth and social sustainability as well. I want to highlight some of those.

To build on the commitments in *The Way Forward*, Mr. Speaker, we have included in this year's budget \$35.2 million to support economic development, research and development, investment attraction, which leverages funding from the federal government and other sources. So we will have \$73 million for innovation and growth and including – this is very important for those of us in rural areas – \$1 million to improve cellular infrastructure through pilot projects. We are increasing connectivity.

Just days after New Year's, I had the great privilege to attend an announcement on behalf of the Department of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation, along with the Premier and Minister O'Regan, for over \$40 million into broadband into the province.

Mr. Speaker, I know what you're asking. You're asking: Well, how much did the province put into this? I can confirm to Members of the House and the people of the province in that over \$40 million, there was \$1.56 million. Mr. Speaker, not often can you put in \$1.5 million and get back \$35 million. That is called smart

management, good decision making and leveraging other funds. That's the approach this government takes.

We're not going to go it alone like the other government, Mr. Speaker, and ship jobs off to Romania, helping the Romanian government with their jobs plan. We're going to ensure that our investments are made in a measured and calculated way so as to leverage the most funding from the federal government and any other sources that we can provide.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, and I know you're probably asking yourself how can you put in \$1.5 million and get another \$35 million back. Well, it was done and now over 70 communities in this province will be connected to high-speed Internet, many in my own district: English Harbour East, Grand Le Pierre, Petite Forte, South East Bight, Little Harbour East and Fairhaven.

I can guarantee you, Mr. Speaker, those people are very happy. In fact, I had the Minister of Innovation with me in my district some time ago and we spent time in those very communities. How many people approached us, I say to the minister, so happy with the investment that not only the province was making, but the federal government, the private sector, it's all about co-operation. We're going to continue to collaborating where we can.

So to build on what we're doing, Mr. Speaker, with broadband and the high-speed Internet in our province, we're going to invest \$1 million in this budget year for a pilot project related to cellular communications and telecommunications. We understand if you're a fisherman and you're fishing out of English Harbour East and you haven't got Internet, how can you go on to DFO websites and file for your licences and permits and other matters?

These investments, they're not only going to help people get on Facebook or Netflix, Mr. Speaker, which people want obviously for their quality of life and connecting with their grandchildren and children away, but it has very practical impacts to enable economic activity and economic growth, and that's why we're very pleased to highlight those investments.

Also supporting innovation and economic growth, we're investing \$19.2 million for culture and heritage including – and this is very important and near and dear to my heart – free access to provincial historic sites in the summer months for youth under age 16. Mr. Speaker, we have so many rich treasures in terms of our provincial historic sites. For a low-income family often taking their children to a site like this would be expensive, perhaps cost prohibitive; we don't want that. We want people to be able to bring their children to these sites, showcase our history, learn of our culture and really soak it all in. I think this is a very wise, wise investment.

We're also including in this year's budget \$12.9 million for tourism marketing. I just want to go back for a second, Mr. Speaker, to the HNL convention. I know a number of Members attended the HNL conference: the Member for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, the Member for Burin - Grand Bank, the Member for Lewisporte - Twillingate, the minister himself and myself as parliamentary secretary. Universally, there was optimism in the room, Mr. Speaker. There was positivity about the future for tourism.

We're seeing the numbers of employment rise from 18,000 to over 20,000. That's an additional 2,000 jobs. That's a large factory, Mr. Speaker, if it was all consolidated in one area, but we're seeing this spread across the entire province in the nooks and crannies, coves and harbours that dot the coasts of Newfoundland and Labrador that make up the rich diversity that we call rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

We're seeing those investments being made. We're seeing the highest resident and non-resident tourism spending in the history of the province. My only wish, Mr. Speaker, is to see those numbers continue to rise because a high tide floats all boats, as they say. In tourism, we have so much happening. We have so much happening in my own district.

You take Kilmory Resort in Swift Current, Mr. Speaker, seeing record numbers. They now even have a package where they're partnering with the Woody Island Resort which is also in my district; you leave from Garden Cove to go to a resettled community. They're partnering with Woody Island Resort and Kilmory, Hotel

Fortune in Fortune and with Hotel Robert in Pierre et Miquelon.

You're seeing those synergies come together. You're seeing that ability to partner. You're seeing that ability to draw on and leverage every asset that we have, including the fact that we have a French island, a piece of France, just 12 miles off our shore. Mr. Speaker, we're seeing a lot of positivity, a lot of connectivity which is why we're going to be helping with making investments in like cellphones and broadband. It helps those economic development opportunities in rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

I also want to discuss our Film Equity Program. We are including \$4 million for the Film Equity Program to support the film and television industry. Myself, the Premier and the Minister of Culture recently visited the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis where *Frontier* was being filmed. It was a beautiful day, windy and cold. Jason Momoa was there and of course Allan Hawco plays a big role in *Frontier*. We're seeing so many investments now and an expansion truly of our film industry.

I think we always need to bring some facts to the table, Mr. Speaker. If you look at the economic impact of *Maudie* – which was a really beautiful film, and the acting was perfect. The filming was done in the District of Bonavista area partially. If you look at the economic impact, there was a \$5.4 million production expenditure for *Maudie* and there was a \$9 million total economic output.

Mr. Speaker, we're putting in \$4 million for the Film Equity Program and just one film alone had a \$9 million economic output. We generated in taxes just \$400,000 into *Maudie*, Mr. Speaker.

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. BROWNE: Four hundred thousand dollars in just taxes to the government from this film operation and a \$9 million economic output from *Maudie*. So we're going to continue making strategic investments in film, in our culture, and in our heritage because not only is it important because it's who we are and we ought to preserve that for the future generations, but it makes good, economic sense.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BROWNE: I also want to highlight – we're doing so much for the economy, despite the negativity of the Opposition – an issue that's very near and dear to my heart, which is mental health and the recent announcement where I joined the Minister of Health, the parliamentary secretary for Health, and number of my colleagues, including the Premier, where there's \$6.1 million allocated towards the replacement of the Waterford Hospital.

Mr. Speaker, as someone who – I've had a family member take their own life. I understand the anguish, the unanswered questions, the whys and the what-ifs. It affects everyone, Mr. Speaker. To see advancing the replacement of a stale and a facility that has such a stigma, I think it's welcomed by many advocates and many people who support the advancement of mental health issues. I'm very pleased to see that not only will we be getting a new facility, Mr. Speaker, but we're going to be removing the name of the Waterford. I think that is a welcomed step for mental health.

Mr. Speaker, before I take my place today, I do wish to say a few words about Volunteer Week. I will be attending the volunteer appreciation night in Sunnyside tomorrow, in the District of Placentia West - Bellevue. We have some 45 communities in the district dotting the coasts of Trinity, Placentia and Fortune Bay and we have such a rich repertoire and a deep bench of volunteers in Placentia West - Bellevue. This was on display no better than I've ever seen, Mr. Speaker, in this past weekend.

I was so pleased to have my colleagues, the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills, the parliamentary secretary for Children, Seniors and Social Development, the Member for Burin - Grand Bank, the parliamentary secretary for Health and the minister of sport in the province, the Premier, the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay, the Member for Terra Nova, the Member for Grand Falls – there was so many there and, of course, I'm referencing the celebrations with respect to Katelyn Osmond. The entire community came out, not only to see her but to help organize and to plan.

There was the largest parade – I would say it out-stripped the Santa Claus Parade in downtown St. John's, Mr. Speaker. There were met and greets. There was an ice show with some 1,200 people there. It was phenomenal. And none of that kind of activity, or any other activity, whether it's a Christmas seniors' supper or a come home year in the summer, nothing happens without volunteers which are the backbone of our rural communities particularly. They have my gratitude. We are all indebted to volunteers, Mr. Speaker, because they do such yeoman's service to all of our communities.

I also want to bring reference to the shipyard in Marystown, a file that is near and dear to my heart as well. People say to me: Well, you're probably not going to make Kiewit's Christmas card list. Well, I wasn't elected by Kiewit or anyone else. I'm going to stand up for the people that I represent. Just as I ask for people to put their positions on aquaculture on the table, I will ensure that companies operating in my district are accountable to the people and obliged to their social responsibilities, Mr. Speaker.

There's a facility down in Marystown that was built with taxpayers' dollars. It was put there by the taxpayers of the province. It has been let to fall into the water. I think I'm well within my right and anyone else who lives in Marystown are well within their rights to ask that if there's an opportunity to sell it, then to execute the deal, let the people of Marystown and the Burin Peninsula get back to work. That's all I'm asking for, Mr. Speaker. That's all the people of Marystown ask for. We want the opportunity to have shipbuilding, ship repair back into Marystown.

Mr. Speaker, had I been here when decisions were being made, I can guarantee you I wouldn't have stood by and sat silent while jobs went to Romania that could have been put into Marystown. It's not my job to help the foreign governments of Europe with their jobs plan. It's our job to put people back to work here in Newfoundland and Labrador. That's why we've taken CFI, a \$17 million repayable loan over the limit. We were just there on this past Saturday. In fact, half of it was blown up by Member for Burin - Grand Bank – and, Mr. Speaker, that's not a lie. She got the push the button and they did a blast while we were there.

There's so much progress happening, Mr. Speaker. We had a blast at the blast. I can tell you CFI is a shining example of how we're going to structure deals, how we're going to have good deals for the people of the Burin Peninsula, good deals for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. If it's within my power, I will ensure and work to ensure with the town, with the chamber, with the company to have a shipyard up and running in Marystown again, Mr. Speaker.

It's something that I'm very passionate about. It's something that is not totally within my power or ours as a government. That's why we're working with others. We're not afraid to ask for help. We're not afraid to ask others and work with others to collaborate, just as we did in St. Lawrence. We have some 300 to 400 people now, Mr. Speaker, back to work in St. Lawrence and we're going to have the same hold true in Marystown.

I can certainly tell you we're proud of our Olympian, we're proud of our gold medallist, but we're going to be even prouder when we have people back to work and she can come home to a town that is flourishing just as when she left.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

It's indeed a privilege to get up here today and represent the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis and the beautiful people in the District of Cape St. Francis.

Mr. Speaker, we're talking budget today. For the people at home, it doesn't necessarily have to be on the budget items and stuff like that; it's a financial bill, so you get the opportunity to be able to speak on different things. Whether you can speak on your district or you can speak on different – all of us here have different critic roles that we have to play. That's what I'm going to do today.

The Member that was just up that time now, he just spoke a little bit. I'm glad he's going to represent his district. I think everybody in this House, on both sides of the House, should represent their district the best they can. They should listen to the people in their districts, listen to what they have to say and make sure their concerns are brought to the House of Assembly, whether it's on government or it's on Opposition, if it's nay or whatever.

They're our bosses. They're the people who elected us and they're the people that put us here in the House of Assembly. They're my boss and that's who I'm going to represent in the House of Assembly, no matter if it's good, bad or indifferent to whoever it is. The people that elected us are the people that put us here.

Mr. Speaker, I know the Member – and before I talk I'm going to go into what I want to talk about – talked about tourism. I really feel our tourism industry, the one right now, is probably one of the brightest we've had in years.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: It is hear, hear, Minister – it is – but it's been a lot of hard work over the last number of years. You also have to recognize the former administration did a fantastic job when it came to tourism.

The biggest thing we have in tourism in our province is our people. No matter where you come from – and I've heard it so many times, people that come from the Mainland or come from different parts of the world, the very first thing they'll say is I can't believe how friendly you are.

I happened to be downtown this weekend and I ran into a lady and two kids. They were from Ontario. They went into Rocket to get a coffee, but I guess it wasn't what the kids wanted. So they came out through the door and they wanted to know where the nearest Tim Hortons is. I gave them directions and she just turned to me and said: You Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are all alike, you're a very friendly people and thank you so much for that.

Those are little things that we can do to make sure our province and our tourism industry

builds like it is going to build. I really hope that government's investments pay off for us and pay off for us in a big way.

Today, in the House, Mistaken Point was brought up here in Question Period several times. You know, this is world renowned. People from all over the world want to come and see those fossils. I'm not a person that's into that kind of stuff. I'm a hunter and I love the wildlife, but we have people from all over the world who come here. It's our obligation to make sure we supply the best possible site that can be there. This is the only one the province controls. We have three other ones that are done by the federal government.

I went to Red Bay this year, and I was so impressed and saw how many people –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. K. PARSONS: Yes, actually I told the Member, I called her and told her I was out in her district. I told her how beautiful it was and how impressed I was with it. You know, the one thing I really did notice that day – it was a grey foggy day and it wasn't a very nice day, but there were four tour buses that day. There were four tour buses on the road.

We look down the Southern Avalon and say: oh, you're going down to Trepassey, there's nothing down there – Portugal Cove South. It was the same trip I had when I was over in the minister's district, but people wanted to go see it. So we have to make sure we do the proper investments because as we know, and the minister knows, tourism plays such a huge role in how our economy is going to do.

It's not the people down on the Southern Avalon. There will be people in bread and breakfasts in my district that will take advantage of what is happening down in Mistaken Point, because people will come and they'll take the whole thing in. They'll go down on the East Coast Trail and probably walk down to Cape St. Francis. It's a beautiful area, but it's something we all can offer. So it's important that we do it right and it's important that it gets done right.

Sometimes it takes a bit of effort. When I heard today it was like six months ago that the

volunteers, who are volunteers, requested a meeting with the minister and still haven't had a meeting, I mean there's something wrong with that. There's no doubt about it, there's something wrong with that.

No matter what it is, I don't know, but we all have to work together to make sure – like I said, I congratulate government and I think we played a major role, but tourism is a huge industry in our province. We all have to work together to make sure we have the best product ever. That means meeting with people, meeting with the volunteers, because our volunteers are the people who put people in these places and make people want to come back. It's the people of Newfoundland and Labrador that bring people here all the time.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to talk today – and I just got off on that one because it was a topic today that I listened to in Question Period and it just struck home to me that it's important that we do what we do.

One of my critic roles is the fishery. Today, I really want to talk – and I hope that mainly a lot of the Members across the way are from fishing districts like my own. It's hard to believe, some people say Cape St. Francis is not a fishing district. Actually, do you know what? Most of St. John's is probably the biggest fishing port in the province when you look at it, what's landed and whatnot in the province. So it's important that we look at the fishery.

Mr. Speaker, again, I'm going to give you a little history. My first job ever at 13 years old was weighing fish, writing out the slips, driving along with the fish truck driver. Then when I became big enough to drive a truck, I drove a truck. My father was a fisherman. He was a bit of everything, but if you asked him what he was in his life, a fisherman he was proud of. I have a brother that's involved in the fishery now, and a son that's involved in the fishery.

So my family, I've been around the fishery all my life. I know how important it is to people in Newfoundland and Labrador. I know how important it is to small communities. If you look at small communities in this province, I can remember when you were cutting out tongues and whatnot and how important the fishery was

to everyone in that community. It was the local store, it was businesses, you could see people at once. If it was a good year, people were doing their roofs. They were putting in windows. It just spread right through the whole economy.

Today, we have some major issues in our fishery. I look at in 1992 we brought down the cod moratorium; in 1992 the commercial salmon fishery. Today, if you listen to the Open Line shows, it seems every day they're talking about the anglers on the rivers now and the issues they're having with salmon also, whether it's in decline. I know sometimes it depends on the rivers and stuff like that, but obviously there's a major decline in – and the concerns they have, whether it's hook and release or what they're going to do this year is going to keep two, three or whatever it is.

This past weekend, the crab started in my area and the St. John's area. I'm not sure when it starts in other areas in the province, but I know my brother and them were out and I know a lot of fishers were out down our way. The crab this weekend was very, very – they never caught one-tenth of what they caught last year on their first trip.

Now, there were some reasons given for that. They told me there was a lot of sea lice in the water and sometimes that eats the bait and causes – and sometimes the temperature of the water, crab is not moving. So they're hoping it's going to pick up. Apparently the crab outside in the other areas wasn't too bad.

We look at the shrimp stocks down in area 6 and we see massive reductions. I know last year, and I spoke to the Member for Twillingate - Fogo –

AN HON. MEMBER: Fogo - Cape Freels.

MR. K. PARSONS: Fogo - Cape Freels last night, and we spoke about it. Last year you were allowed to buddy up. So the cost of going down to area 6 to get your shrimp, if you buddied up you could split the cost with somebody else and get one trip out of it. Now this year, he tells me, it can go as high as five, I believe.

That'll tell you what's happening with the shrimp. I know most of the people that are in the St. John's area and down my way that did go

after shrimp are not going, because it's just not feasible for them to go and get what they can. So the shrimp industry, it's a major issue.

Now, the other one is the decline in capelin. Capelin is declining like you wouldn't believe. I know one of my first jobs driving a truck, I went to St. Mary's Bay, I went to Conception Bay, I went to Trinity Bay, I went to Bonavista Bay and I went to White Bay. We used to follow the capelin all around with different boats and truck capelin.

You could get capelin back then, I'm telling you, that length. You could get nice, big capelin. The female capelin and male capelin were probably nine or 10 inches long. I saw last year – and capelin were late coming last year. I saw capelin came in late July last year and they were this big. They were like three or four inches, so our capelin stocks are declining like you wouldn't believe.

I personally believe there should be a moratorium on capelin. I really believe that because I think that it's a food for our cod and I think that it plays a factor in whether our cod is going to come back or not. Also, our herring stocks are down. Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of pictures I'm going to show, and I'll just talk about it – but those are all fisheries that are on the decline.

Mr. Speaker, there are all kinds of fishery regulations. It's based on gear restrictions, fishing seasons. It's monitored by DFO, and there are different technologies that are used. Each fishery has conservation technologies and best practices and limited to the natural habitat and everything else. But, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to read a quote now that was said in 1995, and this is going to be the gist of my next 10 minutes, I suppose, on my speech.

In 1995, in a controversial move Brain Tobin the Canadian federal minister of Fisheries and Oceans reopened the hunt on harp seals, which prey on cod. This is what he said: There's only one major player still fishing cod. His name is harp and his second name is seal.

Mr. Speaker, I just mentioned a few minutes ago all the declines in different species that we are fishing off our province that are having a major

effect on rural Newfoundland, as well as St. John's and everywhere. It's having an effect on our processing. I asked a question last night in Estimates about the number of plants. Last year when the Estimates came, I asked the same question. I didn't get an answer last night, but they're going to get back to me. There were 25 crab plants and eight shrimp plants in our province and I wanted to know what was happening.

I know we had plants close down. There's one going to be closed down, apparently in Twillingate, and there are some more along the province. It depends on what happens with the shrimp and the crab whether these can survive, and not only can they survive but what's going to happen to these communities.

Mr. Speaker, according to the latest estimates by DFO, they are estimating that there are 7.4 million harp seals and they say that they consume 10 pounds of fish per day. If you look at that, that's about 12 million metric tons of seafood. That's what a seal – and just to put it in context, the total combined commercial fishery for 2017 for inshore and offshore, all species, was 440 million pounds. That's 200,000 metric tons. That's only 1.8 per cent of what is estimated that harp seals eat in one year.

I saw a chart the other day and it showed me that what we catch in one year in our fishery is equivalent to what harp seals eat in six days. I mean, that's amazing. It's absolutely amazing. I'm sure that all Members on the other side of the House will agree with me that we have a problem and our problem is seals.

I'm thinking there are solutions. I'm hoping there are solutions. I just want to show you one thing here and it came from a guy, Brad Rideout, that sent me a picture. He sent me a picture there last year and in the belly of the seal, in the stomach of a seal was 181 female crab – 181 female crab. His prediction, the potential that this could produce was 100,000 eggs on a spawning cycle. Now, that's just on one cycle is 100,000 eggs that that could produce. Can you imagine when we're having issues with our crab what effect one seal had on crab? So what effect is 7.4 million seals having on the crab stock alone?

I have another picture here and it shows a seal eating the belly of a cod. Most people will say okay, seals don't eat cod. Well, they do. They bite at the belly of the cod and they take the belly of the cod. I have another picture here that shows it. I can show hundreds of cod in a harbour with the bellies ate out of them on the bottom of the thing; they're destroying the cod fish.

I also have a picture here of an adult seal that weighs 1,500 pounds, a hood. Now, I'm sure that that seal eats more than 10 pounds a day. Can you imagine what that eats? I mean, you have to look at this; this is serious stuff. It's not funny. People looking at our fishing industry and DFO –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. K. PARSONS: Yes, I do.

DFO, the federal government – and I spoke to the Minister of Fisheries last night about it and he was in full agreement with me, the seals are playing a major issue in the decline of all our stocks but somebody has got to step up. Somebody's got to step up and say we have to do something about it. I mean not only do seals eat fish but they also got what I know you know and some people in this House know – ever see the worms that are in fish? That's where they come from. They come from, the worms – it's like a disease.

Now, it's no harm to anybody eating fish with fish worms in it, just to be clear on that also. I know people will screw up their face and say oh, I wouldn't eat that. But let me tell you something, what it costs to our plants. If you go into a plant, whether it's out in Arnold's Cove, whatever, and they're producing cod, they need a special light to go underneath. They need to pick the worms out of the fish, obviously, before they go and put it to market. So it's a huge cost. And the more seals that are out there, the more worms we have in fish.

Mr. Speaker, in 1972 to 1982, we harvested 165,000 seals a day. We had large vessels. I tell you, I'll always remember my father, he was proud to be a sealer. When he got his flippers every year, he'd go down in the basement and b'y, he'd clean them up like you wouldn't

believe because this had to be done with them, that had – most fellas would just take them and – but he was a sealer. He was proud to be a sealer.

Those people went to the ice years ago, and you can only image – and so many disasters. So many disasters that people lost their lives all over this province because they went. Now, we have technology today. We have better vessels. We have people that can harvest the seal. They got radars, different things. We got rescues that can go out and get them, search and rescue that can go get boats and stuff like that, and we can do it.

But since 1995, now that dropped down to 50,000 seals a day. It's funny, you know, when you look at the reduction, say, in the cod fishery, as the seals grew, as the seals numbers increased, so did the codfish decrease. So I believe that it plays – DFO probably don't believe that they eat cod, but I sure do.

Mr. Speaker, currently we have a quota of 400,000 that's we don't meet, because I guess it's based on markets and whatnot. When you get up in the House of Assembly sometimes you can talk about what this, this, and give all of that, but I think there are solutions. I believe that there are solutions to the problem with seals, and I believe they're political solutions that got to be looked at.

We can develop strategies, and we need the federal government onside to be able to develop those strategies, that we can utilize all the seal. Seal oil, seal meat, the bone and skins can all be used. Today, if you were looking at something for your health, you hear omega-3. Omega-3 is a huge factor in people's health today. It's a capsule that people take. It's nutrition; it's good for the body. We could focus on those things. Our skin – obviously, we have markets all over the world. Some take them and some don't, but we have to be better educated.

I look at Food Aid, and I look at the world around us. I know I enjoy seal, and I'm sure there are other people who enjoy it. Canada is probably one of the countries in the world that's looked up to for our humanitarian, what we do. We have people all over this world – we have 20 million people starving a year worldwide, all over the world. We, as Canadians, are pumping

millions and millions of dollars into these countries to help in aid.

We could make our harvest so that we could supply food to these countries. What a great way to do it, and it doesn't necessarily have to be in a can of seal. There are powders, there's frozen stuff that you can do. We can make it so people in the world have opportunity to have nutrition which will be great for them, and especially in these countries where you find people are starving and stuff like that.

We have a close working relationship with global food aids and global affairs and the Government of Canada. That's how we can produce our seals and make sure we use the seal itself, but until people start talking, until people in this province start demanding that we do something about our seals and have our federal government and our federal fishery department forget about the Greenpeace's of the world and everybody else, we're going to lose an industry.

I'm talking our fisheries industry that we came here as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians – we came over here because we had an industry and it's the survival of Newfoundland and Labrador. I believe working together with that government over there and working here with our federal government we need to do something to make sure we can do something on our seal industry to make sure that our fishery survives.

Thank you very much.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. K. PARSONS: Where is it? One second now, where's that to? Okay.

Can I have leave?

MR. SPEAKER (Warr): Order, please!

AN HON. MEMBER: No leave.

MR. K. PARSONS: Just for one second.

MR. SPEAKER: Does the Member have leave?

MR. K. PARSONS: Can I have leave, please?

AN HON. MEMBER: Yes.

MR. K. PARSONS: Okay. I tell you now, Mr. Speaker, I got so excited about seals that I forgot that I wanted to bring down a sub-amendment. Okay.

It's going to be seconded by the Member for CBS.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible) you were going to leave?

MR. K. PARSONS: No, I'm not going to leave.

That the amendment that was previously presented, the non-confidence motion, be amended by changing the period at the end of Therefore 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, accountable governance or proper concern for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.”

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. K. PARSONS: Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

We will recess the House to have a look at the amendment.

Recess

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Are the House Leaders ready?

MR. A. PARSONS: Yes.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Ready.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The amendment is said to be in order.

The hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

MR. K. PARSONS: Twenty minutes again.

I'm going to finish off, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the Members across the way. I'll sit down a couple of minutes early for giving me leave. I really appreciate you giving me leave and getting me out of the jam that I have myself in. Thank you very much. I really appreciate it.

Mr. Speaker, in the previous 20 minutes I spoke the last 10 or 15 about seals and the effect it's having on our fishery. The Minister of Fisheries is here now. We spoke about it last night in Estimates. We're on agreement that we, as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, need to stand up and talk about it.

We need to get our federal government to talk about it and we need to make sure that the seal industry – there are seals in our province. We can utilize them; make sure that they are utilized to the fullest. There are also agreements. Last night we talked about an agreement, I think it was 2011, where Canada and China were on the verge of making a huge agreement on seals. That would have been really good for the industry here in the province.

The agreement was basically – I don't know if it was the federal government or it was the Chinese government that just slacked off and said no, we are not going to have this agreement. But I think we should go back, as a federal government, to China and look at this and maybe there's some way that we can have a harvest here in the province that could be sustainable and could be very valuable to rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about – and in my previous speech, I am just want to finish off because I really want to get to a little bit on my district, but I'm just going to finish off about DFO's decision on seals. There are quotes that they are after making. It says that there's no evidence suggesting that seals have an overall negative impact on snow crab population.

Mr. Speaker, I showed you a picture, you've seen the picture, we've seen it, 181, one seal – talk to people out there that are harvesting seals. That's who DFO have to talk to. Talk to people who are out there harvesting seals today and when they see what is inside the seals DFO has

to understand that this is what is happening here in our province. DFO has to change the attitude if they believe that's the case.

DFO says there's no evidence of any impact on shellfish. Our shell fishery is declining. I'll tell you another thing too, Mr. Speaker, any groundfish will eat baby crab because there's nothing else there to eat and seals are affecting everything in our groundfish, capelin, everything else like that.

It said an adult grey seal eats two tons per year and cod is only 10 to 50 per cent of its diet. Mr. Speaker, that's too much. What that's doing to our cod fishery is unbelievable. So we need everybody in this House, we need every harvester, processor and everyone to come together, go to the federal government and talk about our seal industry, talk about what we – no, they got to talk about it and say this is serious.

We have many resources in our province and our fishery is probably the best resource that we have because it's a renewable resource and it's from one end of this place to the other end. It's from the top of Labrador to the end of Cape St. Francis that people rely on the fish in our province. It's time we all stand up and realize that seals are playing a major role in the decline of all our stocks in the fishery.

I just wanted to do that today and I know that Members across the way, most of them do agree with me when I say it. It's something that we can all work together on to make sure that our fishing industry survives. It's the reason we came here; it's the reason that we are proud Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Like I said, when you asked my father what he did, he did everything that he wanted to do. But do you know what he was? He was a fisherman and that's what he was proud of.

I know people today that go on the water, they're just proud to keep the heritage of their families going – generation after generation after generation. And in order for us to do that we need to come together as a government, as people in Newfoundland and Labrador, as our federal representatives, our seven people who are in Ottawa, need to come together and do a plan that we can make sure that our fishery survives. I believe that the seal industry is one of

the reasons – if we don't do anything about it, our fishing industry will die. Mr. Speaker, I'll end on that.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to talk a little bit today – this is Volunteer Week. The beautiful District of Cape St. Francis is very lucky, as are all small communities and large communities and cities and towns, everywhere in this province. We're so lucky that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians get up and do what they do. I think there's no other province in Canada that has so much volunteer hours as Newfoundland and Labrador does.

It's not only the volunteers – there are volunteers that I always talk about, a couple of ladies in my own hometown of Flatrock. I always say please God that they stays there for so long because I think they got you from the time your born to the time you die. Anything in the community, whether it's a baptism that needs to be done or something with the church or when you're young, there could be a recreation program and stuff like that, they're there to count out.

When you die, they're the bereavement team in the church that helps make sure that things run smoothly and the readings are done and the family doesn't need to worry about this. Their names are Anita Dyer, Madonna Wilkinson and Bun Hawco. They're in my community and when I look at the word volunteer, I look at those three people and say thank you for all that they do because they do so much in the small community of Flatrock. It's unbelievable. Now, there are volunteers like you wouldn't believe in the community, but I single out those three because they really have an effect like I said on so much.

Mr. Speaker, I look at the Volunteer Fire Department. I had an opportunity this weekend to attend the Firemen's Ball for the Torbay Volunteer Fire Department. The Torbay Volunteer Fire Department takes care of both the communities of Flatrock and Torbay. They have a station in Flatrock where they have two trucks. I have to say, last year – you'd be surprised about this one – they had 236 calls. That's 236 times that the Volunteer Fire Department were called out.

So sometimes when you look at volunteers, you might say okay I volunteer once a month to do this or I volunteer every three months to do this or a weekly thing, but to be out 236 times as a volunteer organization, boy, that's a lot and I really want to say I appreciate it and I know the people in the towns really appreciate what they do.

They did 118 medical calls last year. I remember one day my mom got sick and we needed to call an ambulance. The first ones that came through the door were the Torbay Volunteer Fire Department. They made her feel comfortable. She was so appreciative they were there. That's what they do. They do a fantastic job.

When we talk volunteer firefighters, when that phone rings or the bell goes off, who knows what they're going to face. Who knows what's going to happen. Is it a fire? Is it an accident? Is there someone hurt? Is there someone burned? Is there someone caught in a building? Nobody knows what they're going to face when they leave that night. It's not only the volunteer firefighter that goes, it's the family that watches them run out through the door and wonders what are they going to face tonight or what are they going to face today.

To all volunteer firefighters and people that do volunteer, I really want to say Volunteer Week – and I had the opportunity to speak at Saturday night's event. On the event that night, Mike Matthews had 25 years of service to the Torbay Volunteer Fire Department, so he's at it for 25 years. There was also Paul Blundon who was there for 20 years.

The Torbay Volunteer Fire Department has been in existence for 44 years. They've been on the go as a volunteer unit in the areas. Like I said, they do Torbay and Flatrock. The chief, Mike McGrath, has been there for 44 years.

AN HON. MEMBER: How long?

MR. K. PARSONS: Forty-four years he's been – not always as chief but 44 years he's dedicated his time and his effort. I explained the other night; I said he's like a dog on a rabbit. When he has something, he's not going to give up. He's going to keep going and going until he gets it.

Sometimes you can do your best but that's the way he is.

Do you know what? The 42 members of that department appreciate everything he does and the people in the area appreciate everything. His wife, Karen, does because two of them – it's not only Mike, it's his wife that's there. She's on the auxiliary for the last number of years. I think she retired this year from it. But a big thank you to those people that do the work that they do; like I said, Volunteer Week.

I also have another volunteer fire department in my district also and that's Pouch Cove. Pouch Cove services the areas of Pouch Cove and Shoe Cove and Bauline. Their chief is a dedicated man also. His name is Derek Sullivan. Derek is a good guy. He works hard and his heart and soul goes into the Pouch Cove Volunteer firefighters.

They have a junior firefighting program also that gets younger people involved in the early ages, and I'm not sure how many are in it right now, but it's a great program they got that young people in the community can come and be junior firefighters and see the training, have the opportunity to do certain calls, participate in what the fire department does.

In both communities the fire department does a lot, because not only do they do – the Santa Claus Parade usually is the main thing and one of the big events that they participate in. I know Pouch Cove plays a huge role around Christmas with running the dinner, breakfast with Santa and stuff like that, and they're really community-oriented people. So we have to recognize our volunteers.

Another one of the groups that I'll recognize, and it was a part that I played myself for a lot of years, and I watched and last number of weeks we've saw the terrible tragedy with the bus accident in Saskatchewan. I was involved in hockey all my life, but probably the most gratifying time I ever had out of hockey is coaching and being a member of the executive at minor hockey.

For all the communities – and I heard you up today, Mr. Speaker, have to chew on a bit of crow I suppose to your colleague from Twillingate. I played hockey in Twillingate, I

played hockey in Springdale, and we all went on a bus trip and there were many volunteers that got us to where we were to. And minor hockey just finished – it's always around the Easter week, and the time and effort that goes into that from volunteers, no matter if it's running the tournament. I don't know if you ever had the opportunity Mr. Speaker, to run a tournament and have five or six teams come into your community and for you to have to organize the billets for those kids, you had to organize and make sure the schedule was done right and you know parents, sometimes everything doesn't go the way it is. I'll always say when I do a speech beforehand, I always tell people that are in the stands that this is fun and it's a game, and respect of people that are around, especially the volunteers, because it's so important that we do.

Mr. Speaker, the past weekend also in my district – and this one really hit home to me – there was a Ron Cadigan Foundation set up. Ron Cadigan was probably one the best athletes, one of the finest hockey players I've ever played against. Not only was he a fine hockey player, he was one of the most gentlemanly fellows you could ever meet in your entire life. His whole life was nothing but class.

His family, this weekend, ran a hockey to raise the money for MSA and plus the Ron Cadigan Foundation. When Ronnie was in his heyday – I don't know how many people will ever remember back in 1979 when the Shamrock scored the Herder. They beat Gander in Gander. It was the Mike's Shamrocks back then, and they beat them in overtime in the final game, and Ronnie scored the overtime goal. I remember being in my kitchen listening to George MacLaren, me and my father, and we were just so excited because we knew who Ronnie Cadigan was and he scored the winning goal.

This weekend people came together and I think they raised around \$10,000 and his wife, Barb, who is a good friend of mine and a lovely lady and his two sons, two RNC officers right now, they should be so proud of themselves of what they done this weekend to keep his legacy going. I hope this foundation and I hope this event continues for years to come. I was happy to get down there on Thursday night. I would have liked to get there a whole lot more and next year

I may even play in the tournament, but it was good to see and it's nice to see so many volunteers come out to help the family make sure that Ronnie's life – because like I said this man was a true – well, basically a legend in our area, one of the finest hockey players ever to come out of our way, great guy.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, we look at volunteers – and I know the Minister of Education deals with a lot of different school councils and stuff like that and I have to say that that's another group of people that I'm going to talk a little bit about today, about our school councils and what they do. I'm sure the minister will agree that every one of them have different wants and they have different needs and stuff like that.

MR. KIRBY: All 268.

MR. K. PARSONS: All 268 of them.

I know, Minister, that they reach out to your department all the time but these people represent our children. They represent our children in the schools and I know that their needs are high sometimes in what they want, but they're great volunteers and we need them and we need them to speak on our educational needs.

MR. KIRBY: (Inaudible.)

MR. K. PARSONS: And they do great co-operation; you're right.

I'm going to give you an example now, and the minister will know what I'm talking about. In my district we had some major issues with the capacity in some of the schools. Our Holy Trinity was built up and a new school built and some people will say oh, you built it too small in the first place, but I tell you the population changed and there was a lot of different things. When you plan a school, it usually takes a couple of years to get it done, a couple of years to do the planning and the whole area grew by a lot. That school was way out of capacity.

The school in Pouch Cove was way over and above; 263 was the amount that they said could

go to school and we were up to about 350. The high school was at full capacity.

These three school councils, rather than one school council talk about their school and their problem with three different schools, the three school councils got together and had a solution for all three schools. So rather than have K to 6 in Pouch Cove and Flatrock, and K to 6 in Torbay, they said maybe we can go K to 4. The high school – they looked at it and they said okay.

Now, a big thing with high schools sometimes, the curriculum depends a lot on the amount of children that are in the school. They looked at it and said: okay, maybe we can give up grade seven. They did all the work. It's unbelievable the amount of time they put into this. They had to do a presentation to the school, the school board, the school trustees. Then there were some more letters that had to be written to the minister, give you all the birth rates, where we're to. They did it all.

The result was we had a brand new school built that myself and the minister were down to just this year and opened in Torbay. It was the result of volunteers. These volunteers, I have to really commend them. They did such a fantastic job. The reason why we have the education system that we do in my district right now is because of the great volunteers, our school councils and the dedication they had to the children in the area. I want to commend them for that.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible) credit yourself.

MR. K. PARSONS: No, but I helped a little bit along the way.

Mr. Speaker, recreation is also a very important part of who we are. Now, we'll all be out this summer and we'll be going to different sporting events in our areas. Soccer seems like it's a huge sport now. I didn't play much soccer when I was growing up but softball was a sport. Today, in my district, soccer is like – there's a soccer group in Flatrock that, I think, there are about 400 involved right now; take Pouch Cove, Bauline and that area.

I was up to the Torbay minor soccer program and they have massive teams. Every kid in the area is all playing soccer. It's a great sport. The reason why soccer is such a great sport is because it's cheap. Not that it's cheap, but it's affordable to be able to play.

Soccer is a sport that you don't need to have the best skates on. You don't need to have all the equipment on. A pair of shorts and a pair of sneakers or a pair of cleats that they use, it won't cost you an arm and a leg. Today, it's unfortunate that some children can't play minor sports because of cost, but soccer is one of these sports that get a lot of people involved.

When I look at different areas in my district and see what's happening with soccer – recreation is playing a major role. Softball is not what it used to be but soccer is. When you go to a soccer field and you see – I got a couple of little grandchildren now and I'm hoping to be able to go down and see them when they're this high, down kicking the ball and they don't care where it goes to but they're having fun. You watch the volunteers that are there to help out and make sure everything is done, that they have jerseys, they have this, that and everything else.

Recreation in our communities plays a huge role; again, another volunteer group that needs to be talked about and thanked. I know I've missed some. I know I've missed some groups. There are church groups, there are all kinds of fundraising groups, there are harbour authorities, there are so many people out there.

Being Volunteer Week, I'd just like to take the opportunity – and I know all my colleagues in this House appreciate every minute, every second, every hour, every time a person reaches to volunteer because volunteers are the heart and soul of our small communities. We can't afford to pay everyone to do what they do, but b'y, when you look at this province and realize there's no other province in this country that has the volunteers that we do.

I want to say a big thank you to everyone out there that lends a hand to make someone else's life a little bit easier. Thank you to all the volunteers. Whether you save a life or you pick up a child on the soccer field, thank you for all that you do from here in the House of Assembly.

Thank you.

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

MS. DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's always a pleasure to rise, stand in my place and speak for a few minutes in the House. It's hard this time, as a minister, to kind of know where to start, Mr. Speaker, because we're always passionate to talk about our district.

The Member that just sat down, the Member for Cape St. Francis, talked about when he visited my district, places like the Red Bay World Heritage UNESCO site. There are so many wonderful things to talk about, places to visit and positive things that are happening in the District of Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair, but what I decided – we get three opportunities during the budget debate process.

Excuse me, Mr. Speaker. Like many people around the province, I'm still working on getting over this cold. I'm improving after a number of weeks.

I'm going to talk about some of the programs under Newfoundland and Labrador Housing today, Mr. Speaker, the Crown corporation that is responsible for the implementation of government's social programs which are very, very important to this province. I'm going to use that opportunity today. I'll have another opportunity to talk about the Department of CSSD and I'll have an opportunity to talk about my district.

Anyone that's viewing today that are wondering about the various programs and services they might be able to avail of under Newfoundland and Housing, this would be a good opportunity for them to listen. Sometimes, Mr. Speaker, we think we're here in the House and no one is watching. I know people are watching because if you were to come into my office there's a whole windowsill full of cards that I get from people, often they're in seniors homes and out in places like Heart's Delight, the Golden Years Manor and those places. They send little notes and they provide you feedback on what you said. Maybe not always so many on a sunny day but we know that people are watching.

Before I start, Mr. Speaker, I, too, like the previous speaker, want to mention Volunteer Week. When I go up and down through my district in my mind and think about the communities, man, we have people that have volunteered for a long, long time doing tremendous work.

There's a little something that I always say about the fundraising efforts in our small communities. We go out and we buy the food and we come home and we make a dish. Then we bring it to a community centre and we buy it back. We call it fundraising so that our children can go on school trips and things like that.

We have a lot of wonderful people doing great things, Mr. Speaker, people often – not always, you don't have to be on a committee or things like that to be a valuable volunteer. You might be that person that's home making a big pot of chili for a hockey tournament or something; lots of examples.

Just this morning, Mr. Speaker, myself and the MHA for Lewisporte – Twillingate, we started our day with a wonderful breakfast down at the Vera Perlin. Another group that's doing some fantastic work.

Speaking of volunteers, I would be remiss if I didn't mention a Mrs. Jean Hanley. I found out today she's turning 95 – actually, we share the same birthday, the 24th of May – turning 95, looking very sharp and smart down there this morning. Started volunteering, I believe, in 1961. So 60 years of volunteering is worth mentioning in our province. I told her to come in to the House of Assembly on the 24th of May and we'd be happy to acknowledge her, certainly worthy of the recognition.

One final thing, Mr. Speaker, before I get to talk about the housing programs. Often across the way Members will get up and talk about all of the people that are leaving the province. They can't afford to live here, they're going in droves. The Member for Grand Falls has done some great work around getting up and counteracting that, but I also want to say, recently – I'm going to talk about the housing strategy in a minute.

As I was coming back last week from Toronto, sitting next to a lady on the flight, three children

under the age of five, Mr. Speaker, beautiful children, and we got to chatting. I said – and her husband was with her, so that was a family of five. I said, are you guys from Newfoundland and Labrador? No, she said, but we moved to CBS a year ago. I said, oh nice, so do you like it out there? It's a lot better for us, for me and my young family than in Toronto. She said we love it. I thought, how nice. There are people moving to the province to work, and that's an example.

A couple of weeks before that when the games were on in Deer Lake, Mr. Speaker, I went to visit my grandmother in the hospital in Grand Falls and there was a couple that came in visiting a lady in the next bed. I got chatting to them, nice day. And like we do, we're always very personable here in our province, I said where are you guys from? He said we lived away for 42 years and we just moved home 10 months ago and I can tell you my dear, it was a happy day when we moved back.

That's just two examples. People are coming back because it is a wonderful place to live, to work, to play and raise a family. I feel privileged every single day, Mr. Speaker, that I get up here in this beautiful province.

Mr. Speaker, *Budget 2018* provided significant investment to help Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, providing tremendous support and housing options for vulnerable populations to help address homelessness throughout our province. Since coming into this portfolio last summer, I've had some tremendous opportunity, eye-opening experiences to appreciate the valuable work of the people in Housing, in the Department of CSSD, volunteer groups and stakeholders.

Often, we don't see the people that work down in the trenches and do challenging work. Last week, on the 11th of April, I had the opportunity – my daughter joined me. We participated in a Point-in-Time Count where we walked Water Street about midnight. We went into back gardens, back alleyways.

We surveyed people, talked to people who don't have a roof over their head to try to get a better understanding, Mr. Speaker, of what their housing needs are. I'll tell you that was an experience that made me realize on a new level

the importance of the programs that Newfoundland and Labrador Housing provides to the vulnerable and the marginalized in our society.

Mr. Speaker, I won't have time in my remaining minutes to get deep into this, but I want to talk about how the *Budget 2018* investments will continue to support many of the vital programs at Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. Programs that are designed to assist persons with disabilities, persons with complex needs, seniors and families with low incomes, as well as the homelessness throughout the province.

Investment in Affordable Housing is one of the programs that we always have a tremendously big uptake on, Mr. Speaker. Our government's multi-year infrastructure plan is a strategic framework that will guide priority infrastructure investments throughout Newfoundland and Labrador over the next five years. So all about having a plan and following that plan, because every day we see examples in this House of what happens. When we look back over the last decade, \$25 billion in oil money flowing and what happens when you don't have a plan and we're left in a situation like we were left within our province in the fall of '15.

This framework delivers on our government's commitment to release a multi-year infrastructure plan that balances fiscal responsibility with the need to address key infrastructure priorities. That's what it's all about, Mr. Speaker. As a government, every day we have to find that balance. We don't have that money tree. Often when people come in to me, groups – and there are always lots of ask, a lot more ask than there is money. Often, I think: I wish I had a money tree. Mr. Speaker, governing in a fiscally responsible manner is all about balancing fiscal responsibility with the need to address key infrastructure.

One of the things, I think, Mr. Speaker, that our government has done a very good job at and there is countless, positive examples, we have been very successful in leveraging federal cost-shared funding through strong relationships. We look no further than Municipal Affairs and Environment. My colleague has done a great job in leveraging funds there.

In housing, we have done tremendous work there, Mr. Speaker. In transportation, roads – wonderful roadwork happening, especially up in my district. It's all about partnering and trying to get the work done when you don't have all of the funds that you need to carry out the job on your own.

The federal-provincial affordable housing program delivered through the NLHC provides funding to assist in the creation of modest, affordable, rental housing in partnership with the private and non-profit sectors. Mr. Speaker, this money goes to benefit many low-income households.

Just recently, we went out with a call for proposals. We had about \$6 million to work with, Mr. Speaker, and we have had \$42 million in requests come in. So even though there's been tremendous work done around the investment in affordable housing, there are still lots of need there. There's so much I could say around that whole piece.

We look at our housing stock in housing; we see that we have a misfit right now, Mr. Speaker. We have an aging population. All of us are familiar with the fact that years ago we had many large families so we have a lot of housing stock that is three and four bedroom. The people on the wait-list looking for housing are looking for one and two bedrooms. These are some of the issues that we have to deal with. Do we take those larger homes and do we renovate and build them into duplexes and things like that? But it is very valuable money going to low-income people in our province, Mr. Speaker, many of which are seniors and on a fixed income.

In 2018, \$2.7 million will be invested to leverage federal funding to enable the Housing Corp. to continue developing affordable housing options under the Investment in Affordable Housing by partnering with affordable housing developers in the private and non-profit.

Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of notes here and I want to skip over the high level. I don't want to get down too much in detail because if people want to know the detail of the program, they can certainly call over to Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and get that information.

Since last spring, since April 2017, NLHC has awarded over \$9.6 million in tenders to modernize, renovate and upgrade more than 600 social housing units province wide, Mr. Speaker. Approximately \$6.3 million or 65 per cent was provided through the 2016 Federal/Provincial Social Infrastructure Fund Agreement. So money very well spent, and we hear that in whatever area of the province we travel, people certainly appreciate the investments that Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and this government is making.

Mr. Speaker, in 2018-2019 the provincial investments for social and affordable housing include – and I'm just going to name two or three – significant money going in to help these low-income people. More than \$10 million being spent for maintenance, repair and upkeep of public housing properties, to ensure that there will be safe and high-quality homes available for those tenants that reside in them. Almost \$4 million to modernize and renovate public rental housing to sustain the housing inventory over the long term.

One of the things I haven't mentioned is when we put this money into the economy, when we're repairing houses, when we're building new, that is an effective economic stimulator as well. We invest the money and that creates jobs and that helps families. So it has a very positive ripple effect, the economic spinoffs from the continuation of affordable housing and home repair programs. It contributes significantly to the local housing industry's retail and labour sectors throughout the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, these investments will help us strengthen our provincial economic activity and significantly improve the quality of life for thousands of our residents right here at home.

I want to mention the Home Repair Program, Mr. Speaker, and I bet there's not an MHA in this House that is not familiar with the Home Repair Program or that don't have constituents that pick up the phone and call. This year, \$41 million –

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MS. DEMPSTER: Forty-one million dollars from the Affordable Housing Agreement will help fund federal-provincial Home Repair Programs, Mr. Speaker. Once again, those are delivered, administered through the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation to assist lower income households who require renovations and/or accessibility modifications to their homes.

Mr. Speaker, budget '18 has committed an investment of \$8.2 million, which will enable us to continue assisting these homeowners. Sometimes elderly people, or low-income people living in a house, sometimes they need windows because there's a draft. Sometimes they need new shingles.

Another thing, Mr. Speaker, that we're getting a lot of calls on as people age is maybe they need modifications in their bathroom. Maybe they need things installed to prevent slip and fall and things like that. The Home Repair Program goes a long way in assisting those individuals in our province.

Mr. Speaker, the average Provincial Home Repair Program recipient is 68 years old, has an annual income of \$21,000 and occupies a 49-year old house in a rural part of the province. That's the value of putting money in to assist those individuals that financially, they could not do it on their own, Mr. Speaker. So that's the home repair.

The Home Energy Savings Program, Mr. Speaker, *Budget 2018* will enable Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation to invest \$2 million through the Home Energy Savings Program. Big money, Mr. Speaker; \$10 million for this and \$8 million for that. Nobody on the other side gets up and talks about the wonderful things we are doing, which also helps their constituents too. I'm sure their constituents are availing of these programs as well.

Through this program, Mr. Speaker, the Home Energy Savings Program, grants are provided to low households for cost-effective home upgrades to improve energy efficiency. This initiative is targeted to assist electrically heated households with low-incomes to upgrade their homes and to improve its energy efficiency.

I can't think of a more timely time to make our homes more energy efficient, Mr. Speaker. When we think about Muskrat Falls coming online, and when we think about what that's going to do to electricity rates, very unfortunate.

A Member on the opposite side today said here they go again bringing up Muskrat Falls. How can we not bring up Muskrat Falls, Mr. Speaker? It impacts everything. The money that's going there impacts what we do in programs and services. It impacts the Aunt Nellie's and the Uncle Joe's that live around various parts of our province because there is only so much money coming into the coffers, only so much revenue to work with, Mr. Speaker, and I believe we have done a tremendous job putting a road map in place, *The Way Forward*, charting a course, balancing fiscal responsibilities with the realities that we inherited in the fall of '15.

Mr. Speaker, future electricity rate management is a priority for this government. My colleague, the Minister of Natural Resources, speaks about this often in the House. As a government, we have already instructed Nalcor to explore and pursue all options for achieving electricity rate management. We know that if we have the doubling of electricity rates, many people will not be able to afford to keep their lights on. That's why we are taking active measures now, Mr. Speaker, to manage our way through this mess as best as possible for the taxpayers of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing's Home Energy Savings Program will provide grants of up to \$5,000 to eligible households with income thresholds of \$32,500 or less. This program specifically addresses those who are reliant on electricity for heat and that would consume 15,000 of electricity annually. So that's that program. My time is running out.

The rent supplement; since I have been in the department we've had a number of groups coming in and presenting to us. One of the things that we heard again and again: We would like for you to make the rent supps portable. Mr. Speaker, we listened and that is an area, that is a direction we're moving in. The rent supp is tied to the person that's renting the apartment and it is not tied to the landlord.

I am very pleased that \$10.9 million has been allocated to the Rent Supplement Program. This includes an additional \$2 million, Mr. Speaker, over 10 years to further increase the number of rent supplement units to support a portable rent supplement pilot program. People are very pleased – we've heard the feedback – with the action that we have taken on that. That will increase our supplements in the province up to 1,757 units and will allow us to expand the program to many different communities throughout the province.

This program supports individuals and families again on low income and individuals with complex needs by subsidizing the rental difference between what a private landlord is charging and what the tenant can afford to pay. It's valuable work, Mr. Speaker. We have to do what we can for those residents in our society that may not be as well off as some of the other residents. For various circumstances in life they find themselves where they find themselves. I believe it's incumbent upon all of us to help support them where we can.

Mr. Speaker, there's the modernization, improvement, maintenance; there's the Supportive Living, the Provincial Homelessness Fund. We're currently working on a homeless plan.

Mr. Speaker, 20 minutes goes so fast. I would love to have more time to talk about the really valuable work happening at the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, but I'm sure I will have another opportunity again.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I'm very happy to stand and to speak to the budget. Budgets really must be about people. Budgets are about people. Budgets are about the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and budgets are about promises and they're promises that should be embedded in an overall vision.

They should reflect a vision for the province. Budgets are really just a way of getting there. That's what the budget should be.

The budget isn't about, well, this is what our budget is and then people are going to have to fit in somehow and people are going to have to cope somehow. It actually should be the other way around. It's not about what can we cut or what can we reduce. It's about, who are we as a province? How do we now envision where we go as a province? How do we envision our communities? How do we envision the lives of seniors in our community? How do we envision our universities and our post-secondary education? How do we want to live together as a people of Newfoundland and Labrador? How do we want to make sure that everyone has what they need in order to be included and in order to thrive?

Then a budget, after that vision the budget is a promise to say this is how we're going to get there. This is what we're going to do with the resources we have. It's about a plan, it's about a promise for short-term and it's about a promise for the future as well.

Budgets are also about saying to the people, here are the resources we have. We have a vision. We're looking at how we will all live together. We are looking at who needs what in order to be able to thrive. Then here are the resources we have currently and here are the resources we feel we'll have in the future, and this is the plan on how to operationalize that vision for the people of the province.

It's also about looking to and planning the future, while not only planning the future, but while taking care of the present because that's also what budgets are for. It's about making sure that those who have needs, that their needs are met in order to be able to thrive and be included in our society.

It's about taking care of the present as well. It's about the people, our services, our health care, our education. It's about justice, about infrastructure, the environment, business and commerce. It's about our people, our seniors, our children, our youth, our working families and those who are unable to work in traditional ways. It's about all of that together. Primarily,

our budgets should be about fairness. They should be about justice and they should be about equality. Those are the signs of a healthy society and a healthy economy.

So the driving goal of budgets – although we have some very significant economic challenges, we know that. Everybody in this House knows that. Everybody in the province knows that because a lot of people – some people more so than others – are living those challenges. Those challenges are facing them in their homes. They are facing them in their bank accounts. It's facing them in what their children can and cannot do. There are many people who are living, on a day-to-day level, the economic challenges that we face together as a province – some, more so than others.

That's what we have to look at when we're looking at our budgets. How do we ensure fairness? How do we ensure equality? Because the rich resources that we have as a province, we all know, belong to everyone. They just don't belong to a company that can extract in mining. They do not just belong to those who are able to fish in a commercial way. It's doesn't just belong to those who can exploit our resources. I use exploit in a positive way, Mr. Speaker, not in a negative way. But our resources belong to all the people of the province.

So how do we share those? How do we make sure that there aren't groups of people who, in an unequal way, bear the brunt of our current economic challenges? That's also what the budget must do.

At this point, because of our tough economic situation, we have to make sure that the primary goal is not to get to a surplus or a balance. That has been one of the targets of our budgets in the past few years by this government, which has then made groups of people in our society bear the burden in an unfair and an unequal way – again, those who bear the burden in their day-to-day living.

Our budgets must be about strengthening our people, empowering our people, strengthening our whole province, not just those who are lucky enough to reap the benefits, but it must be fairly appropriated so that everyone shares in what prosperity there is.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. ROGERS: Because that prosperity comes from the use of our resources that are made by everyone. We all know that.

The goal and target can't primarily be to get to this concept of balance or surplus. We have to make sure that people have what they need so they can live fulfilling and healthy lives. It's about short-term goals and it's also about long-term goals.

Our budgets must promote fairness, equality and sustainability. Sustainability is one of the things that we really strive for. Whether it's sustainability in our environment, whether it's sustainability in our economy, whether it's sustainability in our jobs, that must be our goal. With that sustainability, once we have plans that ensure sustainability, then we will be able to take care of our deficits and our debts, but not before that.

It is with this lens that we must examine our current budget that's before the House. The success of a budget, Mr. Speaker, is if the budget is steering the economy towards being richer in good jobs, both in the short-term and whether the economy is becoming richer in good jobs in the longer term as well. That again is about sustainability.

Mr. Speaker, we haven't seen anything in this budget that clearly points to that. We haven't seen any major initiatives that really guarantee us, that really show that government's plan is about sustainable economy and that it's about sustainable jobs.

We know that we have a jobs crisis right now. We don't often want to use that word "crisis," but we are in a jobs crisis if we look at the real unemployment rates here in the province. The real R8 factor, unemployment rates in our province, is heading towards 20 per cent. That means 20 per cent of work eligible, people of work age who are wanting to work in the province, one out of five will not have sustainable employment. That's a problem. That's a huge problem.

Now, I might be accused of saying that's fear mongering and it's doom and gloom. I'm very optimistic, Mr. Speaker. I'm optimistic because I believe we can do something about that. We can't ignore the reality. A lot of critics have said that we have a spending problem. Really, what we have is a revenue problem and that revenue problem comes, stems directly as well from our unemployment problem.

We know that there were three large infrastructure projects that were megaprojects that were winding down, which would affect not only our unemployment rate but also affect our job rate. We all knew that was coming. That wasn't a surprise. It wasn't a tsunami. We knew that. For years, we knew that.

So that pointed to the needs of creating diversification in our jobs market. Government hasn't really done that. In fact, what has happened over the past years is that we've seen government cut infrastructure all across the province, the infrastructure that would help communities look at how to build sustainable jobs and economies, small businesses, medium-sized businesses embedded in communities, businesses that would continue, businesses that would weather the storm when we've been solely dependent, almost solely dependent, or primarily dependent on the oil and gas industry which then makes us very vulnerable, extremely vulnerable to international markets.

We will continue to reap some of the benefits from the oil and gas industry – absolutely, that's a resource that is available to us. But unless we build sustainable jobs that are embedded in our communities, that are diversified, that respond to the real needs of the people in our communities but also respond to the expertise, to the creativity and innovation of people across the province, we will constantly be going through this boom-and-bust cycle. There's been nothing that's really concrete in this budget that points to that.

The other issue that I would like to address – and again, Mr. Speaker, this is not doom and gloom; this is the reality of the lives of many people in our province. It's only if we face those realities and then start to plan for them in a real way where we engage the people of the province, engage the people all across the

province about – and we know that often those who are closest to the problem are also often closest to the solution.

There has been no indication that we really engaged our communities in looking at how do we together, as a province, build that sustainable economy. How do we build those sustainable jobs? What government has done – we know that over the past few years we have lost hundreds and hundreds of jobs in the public service. Some by direct cuts in the early mandate of this government. Some by attrition. Some by attrition through retirement. Some by attrition through not filling vacant positions.

What has that done? It's decreased the number of jobs available in the province. It has created more unemployment. What we do know is that more unemployment creates even additional unemployment, because there is less money circulating in the economy.

There haven't been proactive measures to mitigate against the effects that we have experienced as a province due to the fluctuating international market prices of oil and gas.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER (Reid): Order, please!

Continue, please.

MS. ROGERS: Thank you very much.

Not only has that been a factor in affecting the revenue streams of our province, because the diminishing employment situation and also the rising unemployment and also the loss of jobs, but we've seen cuts in the last two budgets that really weakened our people.

When we look at the issue of over-the-counter drugs; we had a program of over-the-counter drugs, particularly for people on very low incomes, that has been cut. We have people, particularly senior women, who are unable to afford calcium supplements to help prevent osteoporosis. We've seen the cutting of over-the-counter drugs for people who've had surgery and who may need laxatives or similar drugs.

I'm sure the Minister of Health, in his former role as a surgeon, wouldn't be happy if his patients after surgery couldn't afford that kind of medication in order to be able to recover from their surgeries, but that's what we see happening. We also see a number of people who were used to taking iron supplements.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The noise level in the House is too high. I ask Members to restrain themselves. If they have to have conversations they can go outside the House and have those. I'm having trouble hearing the speaker.

Thank you.

Continue.

MS. ROGERS: So, Mr. Speaker, we've seen people who were used to taking and were medically required to take iron supplements, but cannot now because the over-the-counter drugs have been cut out.

Now someone from government may say they can appeal that, and we've seen that. I'm sure all of us, every Member of this House, have heard from constituents who have talked about how difficult that policy, that cut has been on their lives. The appeal procedure doesn't work. It takes a long time. It's very onerous.

The other effects of the last few budgets have been, for instance, we still have people paying the levy. We saw, when that was first introduced, what an unfair and unequal extra tax that was.

We also see the Adult Dental Program. Many of us are speaking particularly with seniors in our districts who cannot afford dentures, who cannot afford dental care. Particularly, people who are at the lowest level of income, whether they're on income support and also trying to find affordable housing, who cannot afford dental work. How difficult it is for them.

People who say that they – older women, particularly, who say I want to go out. I can't afford teeth; I can't go out in public like this. So

the effects of isolation and the effects on their mental health, of depression, those effects on the last two budgets are still negatively affecting many people in our province.

We heard rumours a few months ago that there was the possibility that government was going to reintroduce the Adult Dental Program. We were really excited about that. The people who heard those rumours and spoke to us were really excited about that, but nothing was done. Nothing was done to mitigate the negative effects of the last few budgets on the people of the province.

When we go to places like The Gathering Place. I know many Members of government, Cabinet ministers, have visited The Gathering Place. The number of people that are accessing the services at The Gathering Place for food, for clothing, for temporary shelter during the day is increasing exponentially.

They're trying to open up a dental clinic for people who have been negatively affected by government's policies in the last few budgets. The food banks all across the province, people who are volunteering and running food banks are telling us they can't keep up with the demands.

Mr. Speaker, again I want to stress this is not doom and gloom, but we're looking at what are the effects of government's policies, what are the effects of government's last three budgets now on the lives of people of Newfoundland and Labrador, particularly on the lives of seniors in our community. People also tell us from food banks about the increase in the number of seniors who are going to food banks.

Mr. Speaker, this is not the way to empower our people. This is not the way to make a sustainable economy. By talking about these issues, by looking at these issues, it's not doom and gloom. It's about looking at the realities and saying there's something can be done, we can mitigate this. We have to ensure that we help to strengthen our people as we get through these tougher economic times.

Government has shown no concrete plan. I'm really excited about some of the policies we're going to see through Newfoundland and

Labrador Housing. The Minister Responsible for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing clearly outlined some of those good policies, but still there are so many other outlying issues that are affecting the people of our province. Again, we can do something about that.

Now is not the time to look at balancing our budget. Now is the time to look at how can we create an environment where more sustainable jobs will be created all across the province, and that, Mr. Speaker, is an investment. That will help address our deficit in our income, in our revenue, and that's what we need to look at.

We know that cutting jobs is not the answer. I'm happy to see the government has committed to not cutting jobs for the sake of cutting jobs. Also, government has to step up and mitigate the negative effects of the last few budgets because there are people all across the province whose daily reality is embedded in the negative decisions that were made, the short-sighted decisions that were made in the last two budgets including the fact that those were not addressed in this budget. I believe that government can do something about this. I believe as a province we must and that we can.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's a pleasure for me to rise today and speak on *Budget 2018*. It's my first of, hopefully, three times to speak.

I've been listening to the Opposition that have gotten up to speak so far. Actually, I'm hearing very little opposition to *Budget 2018*. The only thing I'm hearing, like the new Leader of the NDP just said, is talking about *Budget 2016* and '17.

We all know that *Budget 2016* was not a good budget. We already admit that, but it was something we had to do. I think 2018 goes a long way to bring us back to prosperity, to bring us back to getting rid of the deficits. So what I'm

hearing from across the way, I think, is really an endorsement of *Budget 2018*. I'm hoping that when it comes time to cast the ballot that we'll see some very positive voting from the Opposition on *Budget 2018*. I know they put in their amendments to condemn us for our budget; nevertheless, they're only doing what they have to do.

MR. PETTEN: (Inaudible.)

MR. LETTO: I know there's a lot of chirping going on from the Member for CBS, but that's okay. I love that, actually. It gets the blood flowing, you know what I mean.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, what I'm speaking on here today, first of all I have to recognize the members of my district who are making very big decisions today, and that's the members of Local 5795 and 6731 on their future. They're voting with their convictions, and I certainly respect them for that. I hope, at the end of the day today, when the vote is cast, whichever way it goes, that we can move forward with a united front and we can move forward together and hopefully find a resolution to the conflict.

It's a big day for them and I want to recognize them today, realizing the decisions that they have to make. It's very important. It's something that we've done for years and years, since the iron ore industry has been created in Labrador West. It's something that we'll get through. We've gotten through in the past and we'll continue to do that. Mr. Speaker, it's a very important day for them and I wish them all the best.

I also want to touch on the volunteers, this being Volunteer Week. I see Labrador West as one of the greatest volunteer districts in the province. When you look at some of the things that have happened in the past year that required the work of many volunteers, and the commitment of many volunteers, many hours, things like Cain's Quest. I can't forget that because that's a two-year planning process that consists totally, totally of volunteers, and very many – not only from Lab West but volunteers from all over, all four districts of Labrador, the North Coast, the South Coast and Lake Melville, it's volunteers that are involved. There are hundreds and hundreds of volunteers that it takes to run a race

that is world renown like Cain's Quest. It's something that we have to be very proud of.

Things like minor hockey – again, it happens everywhere. We know how many people it takes, from parents and coaches, how many people it takes to run minor hockey programs. Soccer, and winter carnivals – we just ran a winter carnival in Lab West, a joint carnival between Labrador City and Wabush: 108 events. One hundred and eight events that were run totally by volunteers.

AN HON. MEMBER: That's more than the Frosty Festival.

MR. LETTO: That's more than the Frosty Festival – 108 events. I think the Frosty Festival was 70-odd or something like that.

And then you look at organizations like MADD, and the people who organize Relay for Life, a cancer fundraiser, food banks, the list goes on and on with volunteers.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about a couple things that are in the budget regarding Labrador, in general, and Labrador West, in particular. One of the things, of course, is our government's continued commitment to the completion of the Trans-Labrador Highway.

This is a highway that's going to benefit all of Labrador, all of Newfoundland and Labrador – all of Canada. Because it's a vital link to and from markets, and to and from producers who want to get their goods and services to the province. And this year we're committing \$83 million dollars –

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. LETTO: Eighty-three million dollars to the continued paving and upgrading of the Trans-Labrador Highway. It's a significant investment, Mr. Speaker, that will see for the end of this year, hopefully, 180 new kilometres of pavement, pavement replaced in the Labrador Straits, in Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, and the continued upgrading of the other part of the Trans-Labrador Highway that will get us ready for pavement in the future years. So, Mr. Speaker, it is a significant commitment.

Another issue that I want to highlight that's not getting much attention because I guess it mostly affects the people of Labrador, and that's the residents of Labrador that have to travel for medical attention. And in most cases it's to the Avalon and to Eastern Health that they have to travel, which comes at a significant price to the person.

We started a conversation with the Minister of Health and the department, back in the fall, to look at improving the Medical Travel Assistance Program. I'm happy to report that the minister and his officials were certainly very receptive to the idea, and now when a person has to travel for the first time in a year, they will be able to get the full amount upfront for their travel, up to a thousand dollars, which helps people to be able to afford to travel for medical attention. And especially, it will be helpful to our seniors, to our low-income people that have to fork out the money beforehand. I know that they get it back in the rebate program, nevertheless sometimes a significant investment – and I've known of people, especially seniors and retirees, who've had to cash in RRSPs, for instance, in order to pay for that travel upfront.

So this is significant, it's a significant improvement to the Medical Transportation Assistance Program and it's one that I've been lobbying for since I've gotten elected. I can't say enough about the Minister of Health and his co-operation in getting this to the point where we are today, where we have the program in place, it's very accessible and it meets the needs of the people. I want to thank the Department of Health, the minister and the officials for finally putting this in place and we will be very grateful.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that have come up, and certainly the Premier was in Quebec just last week and met with the premier of Quebec and signed a memorandum of understanding with the Province of Quebec to develop the Labrador Trough and to develop transportation infrastructure within the Quebec-Labrador border.

I've spent all my life, or at least 98 per cent of it, living on the border of Quebec and Labrador. Whether it was in the South Coast in my earlier years, when I was a wee thing, or when I was in

my later years in Labrador West when I was a much larger thing, but it's something that I've spent all my life at. I can guarantee you something, Mr. Speaker, that Quebec is not the boogeyman that many people in this province have been led to believe they are, especially the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, this is a great move forward to develop the Labrador Trough, for instance. Now, for those of you, or those Members or people in the province who are not quite familiar with the Labrador Trough, it's about 1,000-kilometre long area that straddles the Quebec-Labrador border. It has numerous deposits of iron ore that is still sitting there. We've barely tapped the surface of the Labrador Trough with the development that's taken place in Labrador West and right next door in Quebec, whether it's IOC, whether it's ArcelorMittal, Bloom Lake, Wabush Mines or whatever. We've only tapped the surface.

We have to look at ways to co-operate – it's a strange word, I know, but we have to co-operate with our neighbours, and our neighbour happens to be Quebec. It's something we have to co-operate – people have to co-operate to develop infrastructure and mining development in the best interest of everybody.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LETTO: In the best interest of everybody.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to give you a couple of quotes that was put out in *The Globe and Mail* not so long ago by some top analysts, and just about the Labrador Trough, for instance.

“The Labrador Trough has the potential to be a major global area' for iron ore production.”

“Canada is a two-bit player when it comes to iron ore production,” – and we are, we're very small when we're compared to countries like Brazil and Australia and other major producers – “but that could be in for a dramatic change because of two words: Labrador Trough.”

Mr. Speaker, when you talk about developing the Labrador Trough, whether it's in Labrador West, whether it's across the border into Quebec, whether it's up the border into the

northern part of Labrador, we are talking about resources that can be developed. When you develop – see, what people don't understand is all the development that's taken place in the Labrador Trough so far has been with the co-operation of Newfoundland and Labrador and Quebec. Any ore that's produced and pelletized in Labrador West has to be shipped through Quebec, because that's the nature of the beast, and that's where we are.

If you look at Tata Steel who's up in Schefferville, for instance, the Quebec government just last year put a significant investment in Tata Steel. Do you know, Mr. Speaker, where that deposit is that Tata Steel are developing? It's in Labrador. It's in Newfoundland and Labrador. They've just gotten the environmental approval for the Howse project, for the Howse deposit, which is a major deposit of iron ore in Labrador that Quebec are prepared to invest in.

So we're already doing the co-operation, Mr. Speaker. Quebec is not the bogeyman. Quebec is a great partner and will continue to be for years down the road. That's just the mining part.

Of course, the other part of that agreement, that memorandum of understanding, is in transportation. Now, when you talk about transportation, I've lived in Labrador West since 1973, and I lived there at a time when the only way out was either by plane or by train. And guess where we went? We went to Quebec.

It was actually during a strike at ArcelorMittal, it was Québec Cartier Mining at the time in Mont Wright. It was actually during a strike that they used the workers that were on strike to finish the link, what we call the Route 389, which is the transportation link from Labrador West or from Fermont, Quebec into Baie-Comeau so that we can travel that. Since that time, they've been investing millions and millions and millions of dollars through the Plan Nord and through other means to upgrade Route 389 to make it a first-class highway whereby you can leave L'Anse au Clair and drive to Vancouver if you want to.

Mr. Speaker, it's something we will further develop, the significant investment into Route 389. The other route that is being very highly considered by Quebec is Route 138, which will

bring us down the north shore of Quebec into Blanc-Sablon and into the Labrador Straits. That's a commitment from Quebec that will certainly enhance even further our transportation link with the Mainland, with Quebec, Ontario and all points west.

Mr. Speaker, I think this agreement that the Premier, both premiers, have signed is a great start to a co-operation agreement that will see development of vital infrastructure in road transportation. It will help us to develop further the rich deposits of the Labrador Trough that will benefit each and every one of us. I guess what we need to focus on is that this is a good way forward.

Now, Mr. Speaker, when you talk about mining and we talk about – and the Opposition keeps asking, where are all the jobs coming from? Where are we going to get the jobs in the future? We talk about aquaculture, we talk about agriculture, we talk about the tech industry, which are all good.

We talk about tourism – and, by the way, Labrador's tourism potential hasn't even had the surface scratched yet, when you talk about the UNESCO sites and the south coast, the Mealy Mountains and the beautiful scenery throughout Labrador. But in order to have a tourism industry you got to have the proper infrastructure in place, whether it's transportation infrastructure, whether it's communications, and we're making great strides in both of them.

Mr. Speaker, I believe, and I'm certain most people on this side, all people on this side believe, whether it's Baie Verte, whether it's St. Lawrence, no matter what part of the province it is, mining will continue to play a significant role in the employment of this province. When you look at what's happening in Labrador West, for instance, with Tata Steel in the Schefferville area; Tacora who's taking over the Wabush Mines property and are working towards developing and getting that project back up and running. They're right on track to do so. If you look at Alderon who's rebooted the Kami Project, what a project that would be. Certainly, when you look at that, it's all positive news.

Bloom Lake is back up and running. Bloom Lake is in Quebec. Another perfect example, by the way, of the Quebec-Labrador co-operation because Bloom Lake, while it's in Quebec, it does create jobs for Labradorians and Newfoundlanders. It does create jobs because the railway itself is in Labrador, totally in Newfoundland and Labrador, that hire Newfoundland and Labrador people. We do get significant positive results and positive gains from a place like Bloom Lake. That's right on the border and it's part of the Labrador Trough. So what we're saying is any future development would basically be of the same ilk.

Of course, as I mentioned earlier, right now IOC is going through a labour dispute, but we know from the past that will be settled sooner or later – hopefully sooner rather than later. Nevertheless, IOC will continue to play a major role in the mining industry in this province.

Then we have Vale, of course, up in the District of Torngat. We're still awaiting the decision from Vale to whether they go underground or not, but we hope that will be a positive decision as well. We know how important that mine is to the government, to the people of Nunatsiavut, in particular, as well as to the processing plant in Long Harbour.

Mining has its fingers in a lot of places in this province. Whether the mine itself, wherever the mine is, it does have an effect on other parts of the province. We will continue to see good revenue to the coffers of this province from the mining industry and we know there are other projects that are on the horizon.

In the District of Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, there's Search Minerals that are looking very positively now into an environmental review process. That's always important. We know there's a strong future in mining.

The sky is not falling. Chicken Little is gone away. Chicken Little doesn't exist on this side of the House. The sky is not falling. As my friend from the District of Exploits said: It's one thing for it to fall, but it's another thing for it to collapse. And neither one is going to happen because we are working towards positive growth in this province. It is a sustainable future and a future that I am very proud of. *Budget 2018*, in

The Way Forward document, the actions that we're taking in *The Way Forward* will go a long way to ensure the sustainability of our province and to ensure that we all have a bright future in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Labrador will continue to play a major role in that future. We're proud of it, we want to be, and we will continue to push forward with any developments but they have to be done in sustainable and environmentally friendly manner. But, Mr. Speaker, the sky is not falling and we are on the right track.

As the Premier so many times says, we will get there, we had a rough start; nevertheless, we are getting there and we will continue to move forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a pleasure to have my first opportunity to speak to the budget. Mr. Speaker, before I make any comments I guess, like other Members, I also want to recognize that it is Volunteer Week. In the City of Mount Pearl and Southlands, and so on, the area that I represent, we have many tremendous volunteers. We actually had the Mount Pearl Citizen of Year banquet only a couple of nights ago and I want to congratulate Ms. Sandra Milmore on being selected as this year's Mount Pearl Citizen of the Year. She is certainly someone who is very worthy of that distinction for all the great work she does with St. Vincent de Paul, St. Peter's Parish and the Knights of Columbus Ladies Auxiliary, Frosty Festival, Mount Pearl City Days, you name it, Sandra is there, always there to lend a helping hand. I was very pleased for her in receiving that honour.

Of course, to all the other nominees, Bren Rumsey and Mr. Stephen Thistle, two other tremendous community volunteers that were also finalists at the event. To all the volunteers in Mount Pearl and in my district, in Mount Pearl - Southlands, thank you for all you do. We

all know the value of volunteers in our communities, in all of our communities. It's important that we take the opportunity to express our appreciation for all they do.

We all know that volunteers do it selflessly. They do it because they just like to get involved; they like to help people and so on. They don't do it for any particular praise, but I think it is important that we acknowledge them just the same.

With that said, Mr. Speaker, I want to speak to the budget. Of course in the budget there are many things that – everything is covered basically, so you can speak about whatever you want. I'm glad I will be having a couple of more opportunities for sure, at least, and perhaps even beyond that when we get to Concurrence because there are so many things that are of importance that are happening in our province right now and I think things that need to be discussed in this House of Assembly.

I want to concentrate on just some of the budget items and acknowledge some of the things here but certainly, at a later time, I want to take an opportunity to speak about the upcoming Muskrat Falls inquiry. I think that's still very important and very relevant for us to speak about.

I certainly want to speak about our relationship with Quebec and this deal, this agreement that the Member opposite just spoke about. I want to speak about this notion of a tunnel that I've seen just came out recently and I want to speak about the separation of the oil and gas division, if you will, from Nalcor to have two stand-alone entities and I certainly have questions and concerns about that. But that will be at another time.

I just want to say, first of all, in terms of this particular budget there wasn't a whole lot to get excited about or be angry about. It was pretty, as they say, stay the course I think is what it was described by, by the Premier, by the media and so on, sort of a stay-the-course budget. When I say there's not a whole lot to get excited about, that's not to say that there wasn't some good things in there because there was. There was some good things there, some positive things. It wasn't what you call negative.

The only negative side to it, really, is – and I hate to get into this whole 2016 thing. I'm not going to belabour it, but I would just make the point that some of the actions taken in 2016, whether we agree or disagree on whether they had to be taken or the degree to which they had to be taken, that debate is over, but some of those measures remain. In particular, for me, at least, the big one at the time was the levy and until that levy is gone, I will always have a problem with it. Once it's gone – if that levy was gone now, I probably would say yes, I don't have a problem with it but the levy is not gone. The levy is not gone. It's still there.

We all knew at the time that some action had to be taken. We'd be ridiculous to say that no action had to be taken. We all knew that there had to be some things that had to be done, but that was the one for me at least. I'll look forward to the day that when you're doing your income tax and you get to that Newfoundland and Labrador tax piece and you get page 4 or whatever and you have to look at this chart that they have there and go down through the chart and discover that you have to throw in an extra \$800,000 or \$900,000 or whatever on a levy – when that's gone, I'll be happy. I'm sure most people in my district would agree with that and people throughout the province as well.

In terms of some of the things here, there was certainly a –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. LANE: Yeah, I heard the Member say 300; I don't know how he managed that one.

There was some increased home care for persons with dementia. I read in the budget some increased home care hours and opportunities there for persons with dementia. I thought that was a positive thing. I was glad to see that there was some additional investment in mental health and addictions. I think, for me, that was one of the more positive highlights that I saw in the budget. I think we all realize that more attention has been brought to the issues of mental health and addictions, as we all know, and it is a problem and it's a growing problem. To see some additional resources and emphasis in the budget on mental health and addictions, I thought, was a very positive thing.

I am pleased to see that there was at least an attempt to say that we're going to be moving forward as it relates to the construction of a new hospital to replace the Waterford. Although, we've seen that type of thing in the past years with the Corner Brook hospital, we were planning it for about 10 years or something. I'm not sure – is there even steel in the ground now? I'm not sure if there's actually steel in the ground yet. I believe there will be, but at this point there's still not. So while it was good to see that commitment for the Waterford, I'll start celebrating when we actually see steel in the ground, but at least it's still on the radar. That, in itself, I suppose would be a positive thing.

I was very pleased to see the recommendations on the Premier's task force on education and that there's money budgeted and so on towards that. I sat in Estimates today with the Minister of Education. As I said to him – and I don't mind saying here in the House and publicly – I believe we're starting to head in the right direction when it comes to our K to 12 system and some of the initiatives that are being taken with the recommendations and so on; definitely heading in the right direction.

Is there more work to be done? Absolutely, but are we heading in the right direction and starting to make investments where we need to? Absolutely, I think we are and I think that's a positive thing.

There was some money put in for smoking cessation, which I thought was good. We have this Carrot Rewards Program, a mobile app to increase healthy living. I don't really have details on that program but it would seem to me if we need to start promoting healthy living, that's good.

The increase of the rent supps; and I heard the Minister of CSSD, she was talking about the rent supps. That is something we had talked about for a number of years – well, since I've been in the House. I believe the Minister of Finance, if I'm not mistaken, while he was in Opposition used to talk about the portable rent supps. That was one of his pet issues. I'm glad to see that got changed, to have it follow the person not the residence. I ran into those issues myself with some constituents of mine over the years. So I think that's good, to see more money

gone into rent supps because there are definitely more people in need of rent supps than there were rent supps. So that's positive.

As for some of the other things the minister talked about, the Provincial Home Repair, Energy Efficiency, the accessibility grants to Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, those are positive but they're not new. It kind of came across as if this was something new we're doing. Those programs have been in place as long as I've been an MHA, I'm sure probably before that. So unless there were increases in the allocations – I don't think there was, I could be wrong. I don't think there was, but that was already existing.

The fact they're continuing on is a good thing because people need them. I've had numerous constituents avail of these programs. There are a lot of people who don't even realize they exist. Only for the fact that I know, in the case of my district, we proactively advice people, send out newsletters and things telling people about it. A lot of people don't even realize these programs exist, but we've been able to help a lot of people with them, and I'm glad that they're going to be continuing.

Obviously, I was pleased to see an investment in Team Gushue Highway. I think there's some equipment out there now on Topsail Road again. That's something that really needs to be finished. I understand there will be work taking place this spring, and there's a significant pot of money put in place to get that up and going again. It needs to be done.

I would say my constituents in Southlands are not happy about the fact that the maintenance is going to be turned over to them municipally. They wouldn't be happy about that. I don't really think it should be turned over to them municipally. As a matter of fact, when I sat on Mount Pearl city council, I vehemently argued against the fact that –there was no way that Mount Pearl, who I represented at the time, was going to get involved in either the capital or the operational and we didn't and we're not, but St. John's signed up for it. It's unfortunate, but at least it's getting built. I guess that's between the council and the citizens in terms of that particular decision.

There were some announcements in terms of health care infrastructure with the Corner Brook hospital, the Springdale health centre and so on. These are all things that obviously need to be done.

There was some additional money there, I believe, to create some more new affordable housing. I know the federal government in its budget, certainly as part of their platform, announced additional money for affordable housing. So I'm assuming Newfoundland and Labrador Housing is sort of piggybacking on those federal programs and getting more money for housing. That's a good thing. That's a positive thing. I certainly support that as well.

The new Home Purchase Program; to be honest, I'm a little bit on the fence on that one because I think if you're one of the few people that get \$3,000, I'm sure they'll be appreciative. I'm not really sure that's going to be the difference between someone buying a house or not buying a house – \$3,000. If it is, I don't know if they should be buying a house to begin with. I kind of question that one a little bit, but I'm sure for the people who get the \$3,000 they will be happy.

Of course, maintaining the MUN tuition freeze, investment in the SIRT team, the mobile crisis intervention team, the Drug Treatment Court and some improvements to the Medical Examiner's office. Those were some of the things in going through the budget that I sort of highlighted, that I thought were positive things, positive investments and so on.

Now, the reality of it is, though, with all that said – we can all stand here and on the one side we can say what a great budget it is. On the other side we can condemn it and say you shouldn't have done this, you shouldn't have done that, you should do this, you should do that, but I think in being fair and balanced we have to realize the fiscal situation we're in.

There's no doubt, if you look at the budget and you look at the money that's coming in and you look at the money that's going out, you look at the size of the debt, you look at the deficit, you look at the growing deficit, should I say, that's growing by – I forget the number, but over a million dollars a day, probably several million

dollars a day I think we were told, \$2 million a day, that's a reality we can't ignore. That is a reality that we cannot ignore.

When I heard my colleague here from St. John's Centre, and I appreciate her comments. I have to say she is, without doubt, a very, very strong voice for the disadvantaged and a great social conscience and all that. We all, obviously, want to do right by our people. Nobody wants to see people do without, and we'd like to have everything. We absolutely would, but I heard her talk about the fact that we can't be worried at this time – at this time we can't be worried about balancing budgets. Well, my God, if we can't be worried about balancing budgets at a time that we're \$2 million a day with a huge deficit, if we can't worry about balancing budgets at this time, when are we going to worry about it? Because the debt is continuing to grow and grow and grow and grow.

We've got to be realistic. That does not mean that we ignore the needs of people, but we have to be realistic. We have to be realistic. She said we have a revenue problem. Sure, we need to do what we can, the government needs to do what it can to increase revenue. I can stand over here and say diversification; b'ys, you need to diversify the economy. You're not doing a good job diversifying the economy.

The reality of it is, yes, we've had some megaprojects which have come to an end. We know what's happened in Alberta. Things are starting to turn around in terms of oil and gas. We have opportunities with mining. We're seeing some investment now in agriculture and forestry and so on, and there are opportunities there. We have to be able to rely on our natural resources and we have to invest. We have to create a sustainable economy and we have to utilize our natural resources, derive the most we can from them to create jobs, but it's not something that can happen overnight. I don't care who the government is. If you switched everybody around tomorrow, nobody has a magic wand and all of a sudden we're going to just create 20,000 jobs overnight. It's not going to happen. I don't care who the government is. It does not matter. It cannot happen.

There are going to be jobs created in aquaculture. That doesn't mean we ignore the

environmental concerns because I've had them too, but it's an opportunity. There are going to be opportunities in mining, there are going to be opportunities in oil and gas and there are things we can do. But no matter who is the government, we cannot just turn a switch and all of a sudden everybody is employed. It's just not being realistic.

I think we have to be realistic about the fact we need to make the investments to try to create more jobs. We have utilize our natural resources to try to create more jobs, employment and wealth, but we have to realize that it's going to take time for that to happen. In the meantime, as that's happening, we have to be cognizant of our spending. We have to be. We simply have to be cognizant of our spending.

Revenue is just not going to come out of the air. I hate to say this. I probably would have said it many times in the past but I'm going to say it: There's no such thing as money trees. They don't exist. I don't think so. I don't think they exist.

The reality of it is that as we turn the corner – and hopefully we're going to turn the corner and things are going to improve – as we do that we have to be cognizant of the money that we are spending. I'm not sure we've gone far enough and we've done enough in controlling spending. I don't have all the answers and I don't think anybody here does. I hear lots of people talk about diversifying the economy, we have to do this, we have to do that, but I don't hear anyone with specific examples of specifically what we're going to do. I don't hear it from anybody.

I don't think anybody has all the answers. I think we have to work together to try to do the best we can to weather the storm. We have to be cognizant of the money we're spending. Yes, we have to be cognizant of people in our province that are struggling. We cannot let people fall through the cracks. We can't hang people out to dry; we really can't. But at the end of the day, we have to be realistic or we're going to sink her – we're really going to sink her.

If we want to believe – and I'm going to take the minister for his word with it – that we were that close to not even making payroll, if that's actually a fact then that's not that long ago and

the debt is continuing to rack up. So we have to be realistic about our situation. We have to be frugal. We have to try to manage our expenses the best we can until we can turn the corner. I think we all need to work together to do it and the people deserve nothing less.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's certainly a pleasure for me to speak to the budget. I guess, Mr. Speaker, in my hour that I have I will do it in three segments of 20, and I will probably talk a little bit about my district and what it means to my district, I'll probably talk a little bit about what implications it will have for my department and I'll probably talk a little bit about immigration.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, as I do each time I stand, I premise my talk by clarifying what the Official Opposition continually makes the mistake – they continually get up and say that we brought in 300 different fees in 2016. I continually say to the Members opposite that is absolutely, totally false – absolutely, totally false. We did not bring in 300 new fees. I will continue to say that until they correct themselves when they speak.

Mr. Speaker, what happened was there are changes to the 300-plus fees that were already in place. Some of them had not changed for 30 years. So when they get up and talk about the fact there are 300 new fees, that is absolutely false. So every time I'm going to clarify that until they get it correct over there and they make that correct statement.

Mr. Speaker, some of the other issues that we want to talk about – and I guess it would be remiss of me if I didn't recognize all of the volunteers. This is Volunteer Week. After spending 14 years in municipal politics, I know first-hand the importance of volunteers, and my colleagues that have spent time in the municipal communities as well, in municipal politics,

would know what I'm talking about when all of our communities really depend upon volunteers who give of their time, not only in municipal politics but also in the community to ensure that we have some of the services that we have in our communities.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think for all of us in this hon. House today it's important to recognize these volunteers and to know that, without them, many of our communities would not be as vibrant as they are today, and certainly would not have the level of services that we have.

I guess that probably is somewhat more evident and prevalent when you look at smaller communities. Many of the service sectors such as Grand Falls-Windsor and Gander and some of the larger centres, we depend on volunteers, but sometimes – these communities have the resources that we don't totally depend upon the volunteers to what areas such as Badger, Millertown, Buchans and Appleton and some of the other smaller communities – Botwood and some of these areas that certainly depend upon volunteers. So, Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to acknowledge that today.

When we looked at our budget in 2018 – and I think we've made reference already to the fact that there's been a significant shift since 2016 when all of us had to make decisions that none of us were very pleased with. But it was a time in our history that we have never ever witnessed it in our entire life, in our entire history as a province when we had to look at what we were facing at the time.

So, Mr. Speaker, some of the decisions that we made, and we've looked at them since that time, and we've tweaked them somewhat, but the bottom line for all of us is that every single Member that's sitting in this House, none of us are here for our own glory, none of us are here for what we believe in. It's what the people who elected us believe that we can do. And I don't think there's one person in this House has any intention of doing anything that will be harmful to the people that elected us.

When we have to make these decisions from time to time, we know that they're not popular. They're unpopular, and that we've had to make these decisions, but you live with that. These are

areas that people have to come to understand that some of the decisions and direction that we want to take is in the best interest – not in the best interest of us as politicians, but in the best interest of the province. It's in the best interest of the people who elected us. Sometimes that may be unpopular, and sometimes there are people who feel that we're not going in the right direction. But we have to realize, we have to look at what's big or what's best for the global perspective and not for the individual.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think in 2018 in our budget this year, I just want to say thank you to all of the people that participated in preparation, the many, many, many hours of our staff that worked above and beyond, many hours, to put together this budget, to ensure that we position our province so that we will have a sustainable future going forward, a sustainable future for ourselves, for our children and for our grandchildren. I think, Mr. Speaker, when we look at that from a global perspective – because I think it's important that we do that – we have to look for the betterment of the whole and that all of us will do our part to make a significant difference to how we run this province.

Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to spend my time going back and saying what should have been or what could have been or what would have been from previous administrations, what's important for us today is to put that behind us. We can't do much about that. We have to put that behind us and we have to start charting the course for our future. We have to position ourselves for that.

Mr. Speaker, in this particular budget, I guess one of the areas that we were concerned with in my district – and I want to talk about that for just a few minutes – is the fact that health care is so important. It's so important to every single individual living in this province. As an aging demographic, it's becoming even more important for many of the older people that are living in society.

With the modern technology that we have, with the modern medicine that we have, people are living longer. As a result of that, Mr. Speaker, there are always added pressures. It's important for us to look at that. I think in this particular budget for my community that we have really – we will be making a difference.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, when we look at an aging demographic, we're seeing more and more of the private sector who are getting involved in Level 1 and Level 2 making beds available and then we look at our commitment to Level 3 and Level 4. We know that some of our regional hospitals are challenged by the chronic care that has to be given when really they're taking acute care beds. It's important for us to ensure that we have the services in place that will provide what we feel would be a comfortable life for those that need it.

In Central Newfoundland and in Grand Falls-Windsor we have made commitment to long-term care facilities. We will be building a new, 60-bed, long-term care facility which will look after some of the needs that's happening and relieve some of the pressures.

Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I didn't make reference to my colleague from Exploits who happens to share half of the Town of Grand Falls-Windsor with me. I know he's excited about that as well. Not only that, Mr. Speaker, but we are going to be providing an additional 20 protective care units at the Hugh Twomey Centre. This is really an investment in Central Newfoundland and I know that the people will benefit from that. It will be something that we will be proud of.

Mr. Speaker, not only that, but we have made commitments to the Central Newfoundland regional hospital which services quite a number of people in Central Newfoundland, including the Botwood and Point Leamington area, Buchans and all those areas. We know that sometimes we have aging infrastructure and we made a commitment last year to start the endo/cysto suites. I think it was probably somewhere in the vicinity of about \$5 million investment in those suites. We are close on that – the minister is giving me an affirmative on that. That will be completed this year.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to that, we are now looking at and we have made investments for this construction year to remodel the laboratories that are in the hospital. These are just two areas that we made significant investments to ensure that we are providing the services that are necessary for the people in Central

Newfoundland and in the Grand Falls-Windsor area. That's just in the health care sector.

Many of our communities in Central Newfoundland – and the Minister of Municipal Affairs has made a significant lobby for work to be completed in Central Newfoundland. I know, in looking at some of the projects that we have and some of my smaller communities such as Badger, for example, we're going to be investing, since 2016 – and we are continuing to invest. We're looking at somewhere close to, for a small community, about \$1.6 million. That's significant when we look at services that are being provided.

We're making improvements to Millertown with the water and sewer and we're investing in their system. It goes beyond that. The largest town in the Central Newfoundland area, Grand Falls-Windsor, for example, we have, and we'll continue to invest – get this –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. HAWKINS: I correct my Member for Labrador West that Grand Falls- Windsor is the largest centre in Central Newfoundland, Mr. Speaker. I'll give him a little bit of history on that a little later and I'll give him the population, but anyway we're not going there.

The Town of Grand Falls-Windsor since 2016 up to present, the Department of Municipal Affairs have invested and will continue to invest \$24.2 million. That, in itself, is a significant investment.

If you want to talk about these investments, Mr. Speaker, back in I guess it was 2008-2009, when the economy was sort of shaky, they had shovel-ready stimulus. Well, when you talk about investment in infrastructure that we're making, this is certainly stimulus and there are many, many – if you just take \$24 million going into a small community in itself, there is a significant spinoff. There are a significant number of people that will be working in these areas.

The Member that talked about, a few minutes ago, my hon. colleague across the floor talked about it's very difficult to say you're going to have 24,000 or 25,000 jobs that's going to just drop from the sky. I agree with him. That is not

easy. But when you start looking at the number of person hours and the number of person years that many of these investments that we're making over the course of the budgets that we're doing, there are significant spinoff and it's a plus to the economy.

Mr. Speaker, we have made commitments to that. We will continue to make commitments. I know that many of us that have had experience within municipal governments, we know how important it is to make investments for the long-term sustainability of our communities. I think our communities are doing quite well. There are some challenges around and we all understand that, but we also have to realize that in order to make sure that our communities are positioned for the future we have to continue to make these infrastructure investments.

I know, Mr. Speaker, as well one of the areas in the province that has been impacted by some of the regulations, the federal regulations, is our wastewater. I know that over the last couple or three years – and we continue to do that – there are significant investments to make sure that our communities are compliant with the federal regulations that are in place. Some of these federal regulations, Mr. Speaker, it's something that has been sort of downloaded on us to a degree in order to be compliant.

Mr. Speaker, it's a very difficult argument to make to try to say that it's not something we should be doing because that's like arguing and saying we're not interested in the environment. Many of the regulations that have been made with the waste water, of course, obviously is for to improve our environment, improve our waterways, improve the effluent that we're putting into our rivers, the effluent that we're putting into the ocean.

What we're basically doing is making sure that those regulations – and we become compliant so that we are good stewards of the environment. Really, what we have to do when we look at the environment, we look at this beautiful, pristine province that we have, we need to protect it. We need to protect it for our young people.

I know that some of the regulations, some of the communities have been somewhat upset with regard to being compliant with these regulations.

With the proper funding, I think that we're moving in the right direction. I think with the time there are certain timelines that are in place that I think we'll be able to meet and to make sure that we do have a good, safe environment in which we can all participate in.

Mr. Speaker, when we're looking at our budget again and what it means to our communities, it's important for us to invest in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. I know that we have made significant investments, improvements within our municipal infrastructure, improvement within our hospitals, improvement within our post-secondary, improvements when we look at how we provide services within our communities, with their transportation.

All of these are very crucial. The services we provide are crucial because we have to realize that we have, as a province, to maintain services for a large geographic area with a very small population. Some of the challenges with that, Mr. Speaker, is not only is it a small population, it's a shrinking population. We have to put measures in place. That's why, for us, and for me as minister responsible for immigration, I think it's important for us to start looking at that. It's important for us to do an inventory of where our needs are going to be, not only inventory of our skilled labour, but also inventory within our schools, within our university.

We know right now, Mr. Speaker, that one-third of our enrolment at Memorial University is either Canadian or international students. If we had to depend solely on Newfoundland students, probably we would not have some solid planning going forward. So it's important for us as a province, as a university, as a college, to be able to attract international students and be able to track students from other parts of Canada. As you know, our population within our schools are getting less and less, and that is putting a strain on our post-secondary institutions. So we have to find ways, if we want to be competitive as a post-secondary, we have to find ways in which we can improve and increase our enrolment. So, Mr. Speaker, that will be a challenge for us.

Mr. Speaker, as I clue up this section of my time, when I move forward within my department, I'm responsible for Advanced Education, Skills and Labour as well as

immigration. So I have a number of departments, really, in the one. One of the areas that certainly is of interest for me are the post-secondary institutions, and I'm looking forward to continuing to work with Memorial University and work with our College of the North Atlantic, as well as our private training institutions. Our private training institutions are very important to this province. They provide services in areas where our public post-secondary education do not provide those services.

So, Mr. Speaker, in my next series of speaking, I will address that and certainly look forward to continue to discuss the budget.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I would move to adjourn debate on the budget.

Given the hour of the day, I would move, seconded by the Member for Terra Nova, that the House do now adjourn.

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

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

All those in favour?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: All those against?

This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 o'clock in the morning.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, at 10 a.m.