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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.

Before we begin today, I would like to draw Members' attention to the following: As Speaker, I am the guardian of the privileges of the Members of this House, and of the House itself. I remind all Members that being elected comes with great responsibility. We all have a duty to those we represent, and it is vital that we maintain the highest standards to ensure that our conduct does not bring the integrity of our office or of the House of Assembly into disrepute. Given recent events, I thought it would be appropriate to remind all Members of our legislated responsibilities with respect to our Code of Conduct.

In his report, *Rebuilding Confidence: Report of the Review Commission on Constituency Allowances and Related Matters*, hon. Justice Derek Green stated: "There is clearly a requirement for a code of conduct that articulates such things as: ethical standards and appropriate patterns of behavior; unacceptable business practices and inappropriate business relationships ... and the recourse available to those who feel uncomfortable about possible violations of the code."

Justice Green went on to note that many of the codes adopted are expressed in general, aspirational language. The intent of the code is to set standards by which the behaviour of parliamentarians can be assessed and, in so doing, provide guidance to them so they can order their affairs on the basis of principle, not expediency or self-interest.

Section 35 of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act* requires this House have a Code of Conduct that: (a) provides guidance on the standards of conduct expected of members in discharging their legislative and public duties; and (b) provides the openness and accountability necessary to reinforce public confidence in the manner in which members perform their duties."

Our Code of Conduct was developed by Members of this House – the Standing

Committee on Privileges and Elections. It was passed by a resolution of this House on May 26, 2008. Since then, every Member of this House swore or affirmed to uphold this Code of Conduct when we took our Oath of Office.

This code is comprised of two commitments and 12 principles that include, under the *Commitments*: "*Members of the House of Assembly recognize that we are responsible to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and will responsibly execute our official duties in order to promote the human, environmental and economic welfare of Newfoundland and Labrador.*"

*Members of this House of Assembly respect the law and the institution of the Legislature and acknowledge our need to maintain the public trust placed in us by performing our duties with accessibility, accountability, courtesy, honesty and integrity."*

Amongst the Principles of the Code of Conduct, I would remind all Members that: They ... "shall conduct themselves in accordance with the provisions and spirit of the Standing Orders of the House of Assembly, *the House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act*, *the Members' Resources and Allowances Rules*, *the Elections Act, 1991*, *the House of Assembly Act* and this Code of Conduct and shall ensure that their conduct does not bring the integrity of their office or the House of Assembly into disrepute."

It is a fundamental objective of their holding public office that Members serve their fellow citizens with integrity in order to improve the economic and social conditions of the people of the province.

Members reject political corruption and refuse to participate in unethical political practices which tend to undermine the democratic traditions of our province and its institutions.

Members will act lawfully and in a manner that will withstand the closest public scrutiny. Neither the law nor this code is designed to be exhaustive and there will be occasions on which Members will find it necessary to adopt more stringent norms of conduct in order to protect

the public interest and to enhance public confidence and trust.

Members will not engage in personal conduct that exploits for private reasons their positions or authorities or that would tend to bring discredit to their offices.

Relationships between Members and government employees should be professional and based upon mutual respect and should have regard to the duty of those employees to remain politically impartial while carrying out their duties.

Members should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

This Code of Conduct has a continuing effect except as amended or rescinded by resolution of this House of Assembly.

As noted in the Green report, "If a code of conduct is to be an important element in a political system designed to foster public trust, it must be seen to be more than merely aspirational; in short, there must be some mechanism for achieving accountability."

And further, "To achieve acceptability by the public, however, any code of conduct that is adopted must be seen to be administered impartially and independently of the political system to which it applies."

To this end, administration of the Code of Conduct was assigned to the Commissioner for Legislative Standards, who is an independent statutory officer of this House and the accountability process for infractions of this code is prescribed in legislation under sections 36 through 42 of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act*.

I thank you for your attention.

I'd next like to welcome guests, and in the Speaker's gallery today I would like to welcome Mr. Ches Crosbie. He is the Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Welcome to you, Sir.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** In the public gallery today, I would like to welcome Ms. Shirley Boone. She's the Chairperson of the Mount Pearl Seniors Independence Group, which will be mentioned in a Member's statement this afternoon.

### Statements by Members

**MR. SPEAKER:** So today for Members' statements we will hear from the hon. Members for the Districts of Mount Pearl North, Lewisporte – Twillingate, Stephenville - Port au Port, Topsail – Paradise, and Exploits.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

**MR. LESTER:** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge and thank the Mount Pearl Seniors Independence Group for the valuable service they are providing to seniors in our community.

The group celebrated its 20th anniversary in November of 2017 and during that time have expanded their present membership to over 500 members.

The group offers many different age-appropriate programs and activities which appeal to both men and women including crafts, exercises, summer outings and a friendship club. These activities offer opportunities for the members to develop friendships and to have fun; however, by far the most popular activity is the weekly card game which often has more than 200 people in attendance.

The seniors also support the community in many ways by donating handcrafted items to the Janeway and by undertaking food drives and other activities to assist community agencies and those in need, even as far away as Haiti.

I quote their chairperson, Shirley Boone: Our seniors enjoy and appreciate all the programs the group offers. It gives them something to look forward to and gets them out and about.

Please join me in recognizing and thanking the Mount Pearl Seniors Independence Group for all they do for seniors in our community.

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

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

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

I rise in this hon. House to recognize Ms. Annie Peckford who recently celebrated her 100th birthday.

Ms. Peckford was born on April 26, 1918, and lived in Comfort Cove until she moved into the Lewisporte Health Care Centre four years ago. She has six children, 13 grandchildren, 19 great-grandchildren and 11 great-great-grandchildren. On her birthday, staff and family members treated Annie to a big party to celebrate her long, healthy and happy life.

Ms. Peckford was described by her daughter, Annie, who shares her name as: A good, hands-on, stay-at-home mom. She kept her children in line and did the best she could with what she had.

Annie attributes her mother's longevity to healthy living and her love for the outdoors. Annie senior loved working in her flower garden and berry picking. She was a hard-working woman, although she was not big in stature, she made a big mark.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members in this hon. House to please join me in congratulating Ms. Annie Peckford on her 100th birthday.

Thank you.

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

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

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

I stand today to acknowledge Mark Felix from Stephenville. At a change of command ceremony held at the Gallipoli armories in Corner Brook on April 21, Lt. Col. Mark Felix became the new commanding officer of the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Newfoundland Regiment.

It was an honour to join him, various dignitaries, members of the regiment, as well as the Royal Newfoundland Regiment Band as he took over the role from outgoing commander, Lt. Col. Kevin Bond.

Mark previously spent six years as the commanding officer of the Army Cadets in Stephenville. However, it wasn't until 2007 that he joined Canada's Reserve Force. In 2009, he became one of the oldest candidates to successfully complete the Infantry Platoon Commander's Course at the age of 47.

In addition to Mark's involvement with the Regiment, he volunteers his time with the Community Education Network, serves as the town councillor in Stephenville and works full-time as an economic development officer.

I ask all Members to join me in congratulating Lieutenant-Colonel Mark Felix on this prestigious appointment, as well as thank outgoing Lieutenant-Colonel Bond for his service.

Thank you to all who serve and who have served our province and our country.

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

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

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

Mr. Speaker, the Swim for Hope is a 12-hour continuous swim relay, where participants collect individual and corporate pledges.

On February 23, 2018, I attended the 22nd annual Swim for Hope at the Conception Bay South recreational complex as the Conception Bay South Bluefins took to the water for 12 hours to raise funds in support of cancer patients and their families in the province.

Young swimmers, ages ranging from six to 18, are members of 11 Swimming Newfoundland and Labrador clubs who, along with Community Challenge swimmers, participate in the annual Swim for Hope in communities right around our province and in Labrador.

The event is fun, requires athletic ability, involves young athletes working as a team in an atmosphere of friendly rivalry against time constraints and other competitive teams. Since its inception in 1996, over \$2 million has been raised through the Swim for Hope. And those funds are shared between the Dr. H. Bliss Murphy Cancer Care Foundation and the participating clubs of Swimming Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members to join me in congratulating this great event and very successful Swim for Hope, and we wish them another successful year.

Thank you.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for the District of Exploits.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in this hon. House to congratulate the Calvary Pentecostal Tabernacle of Bishop's Falls on their September 23, 2016 celebration of 90 years of good works in their community. I had the pleasure of the celebrating this milestone with the congregation, town leadership and friends from far and near at what was a memorable evening of song and prayer.

Pentecostalism has long been a pillar of community support and fellowship in our province. For over 90 years the Calvary Pentecostal Tabernacle has been providing spiritual help and guidance to the community of Bishop's Falls.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join with me in wishing the Calvary Pentecostal Tabernacle congratulations on these 90-plus years, and Godspeed on their continued march to centenary celebrations.

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

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

### Statements by Ministers

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

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

This past weekend the outstanding achievements of the Newfoundland and Labrador arts community were honoured at the 33rd ArtsNL Awards Gala in Labrador City, and the MHA for Labrador West certainly represented our Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Our artistic trend-setters, talented performers and cultural professionals were celebrated Saturday at the Labrador West Arts and Culture Centre. I congratulate all the nominees and this year's winners, including: Duane Andrews, Artist of the Year; Eric West, winner of the Arts in Education Award; Beni Malone, winner of the ArtsNL Arts Achievement Award; Sharon Bala, winner of the Emerging Artist Award; the Newfoundland and Labrador Credit Union, winner of the Patron of the Arts Award; and congratulations to Jacinta Mackey Graham, the 2018 inductee into the ArtsNL Hall of Honour.

Mr. Speaker, we have an enormous wealth of artistic talent that has fundamentally shaped our cultural expression and identity in Newfoundland and Labrador. That is why we are acting on key commitment in *The Way Forward* and developing a new cultural plan in this province this year. We will also launch an Arts Accelerator Program, in consultation with artists, to help them enhance the management, promotion and development of their artistic practice. These initiatives build on the work our government has already completed with the *Status of the Artist Act*, which formally recognizes the important contributions that artists make to our province.

Our government appreciates how much provincial cultural industries contribute to the social and economic well-being of Newfoundland and Labrador. Working with our partners in the arts, culture and heritage, we will set themes, priorities and key actions towards supporting and sustaining these industries over the next five years.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in congratulating all the nominees and winners at the 33rd ArtsNL Awards Gala.

Thank you.

**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. Mr. Speaker, this province is internationally known for its one-of-a-kind culture. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are creative, passionate, incredibly talented and always entertaining. The successes in our arts community are a direct result of the energetic performers, producers and creators who pour themselves into their projects.

I congratulate those who were recognized at this past weekend's ArtsNL Awards Gala: Duane Andrews, Eric West, Beni Malone, Sharon Bala, Jacinta Mackey Graham and the Newfoundland and Labrador and Credit Union. These recipients are just a small segment of the arts and culture community within our province who promote our culture each and every day.

We, too, recognize the award recipients and encourage everyone to continue supporting our arts community.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. Bravo to all the winners and the nominees; what a stellar list they make. Each and every one of them and all of them together are shining examples of the worth of investing in our arts community. Every dollar invested in the arts returns money to the economy many times

over, whether government money or private. Also, it enriches all of our people.

Thank you to all our artists who have given so much and who lead the way, especially Duane, Eric, Beni, Sharon, Jacinta and the Newfoundland and Labrador and Credit Union. Bravo to them all!

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources.

**MR. BYRNE:** Mr. Speaker, the 2018 forest fire season, which includes dry grass fires as well, will be in effect from May 1 to September 30 on the Island portion of the province, and from May 15 to September 30 in Labrador.

The coming season is anticipated to be especially challenging for forest fires. With atypical conditions in many areas of the province, there may be an increased risk of wildfires in these areas.

Mr. Speaker, people cause about 80 per cent of forest fires in our province.

Residents should exercise extreme caution during spring burning and when using vehicles or forestry equipment near forested land. A permit to burn is required to burn brush on forested land or within 300 metres of forested land during this period. Free permits are available from forest management offices and the permitting regime serves to inform forest fire officials of a planned fire event.

Once fire season begins, provincial fire danger maps will be posted and updated daily on our department website throughout the fire season. This will give people the ability to view daily fire indices in areas where they reside or plan to visit.

Mr. Speaker, as people begin enjoying the outdoor activities that come from warmer weather, I remind residents that we must all be

extra vigilant to prevent wild fires from occurring.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. As Members of this hon. House, we are aware the recent dry weather conditions in this province have indeed been atypical and it is concerning to know that wildfires are expected to be more prevalent. I encourage everyone in our province to exercise extreme caution and ensure that they use and adhere to regulations outlined on required permits.

In Estimates we learned that this budget trimmed almost \$200,000 from the department's fire suppression and communications division, hoping we won't see any negative effects from such cuts. It is my hope that the minister and his department not only show concern on this issue with words, but take the necessary action to ensure that the resource and the people of this province are protected from any harm and kept from danger.

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

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

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

I too thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. I join with him in urging everyone to be extra vigilant when it comes to fire in our province's forests. I urge people to understand not only the damage forest fires cause but the risks to professional firefighters and the many volunteers called out to fight these fires.

Maybe 80 per cent of fires are caused by people, but 100 per cent are fought by the brave and dedicated individuals who put their lives in jeopardy. I encourage people this summer to keep our forests fire free and safe.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Oral Questions.

### Oral Questions

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the leader of the Official Opposition.

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

Mr. Speaker, just minutes before the House of Assembly was called to order this afternoon we learned through the media once again that another minister in the government is no longer a minister.

I say to the Premier, the people of the province are watching very closely. I ask him to give an explanation to the people of the province of what's happening in his government.

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

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

I might want to ask for leave, if I get leave, if it's granted. But certainly more than willing, as everyone in this province would know and the leader of the Opposition would be made aware of, last week for the first time I received an allegation on Wednesday morning. We dealt with it very promptly. We put in place a review mechanism through the Commissioner for Legislative Standards, Mr. Speaker, who can use outside resources that would be deemed appropriate to address the allegations.

This morning I received complaints from MHAs about the minister that was in question that we've taken out of Cabinet and out of caucus, Mr. Speaker. We've addressed these promptly. We've met with our caucus to explain the situation as best we could, always being mindful that we do so in a very confidential way. I will say that these complaints that we received this morning are not sexual or not physical in nature.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The leader of the Official Opposition.

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

The Premier's response, I can tell you, raises many, many questions. He's taken a minister out; he hasn't named a minister yet.

Can he identify to the House who has been removed from Cabinet? Can he tell us, what is the nature of the allegations against the minister?

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

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

I've made public comments that the minister under review is Minister Kirby. I spoke with him. He's been replaced by Minister Hawkins to take on the official role within the department. Anything specific, Mr. Speaker, I'm sure the leader of the Opposition would understand that I will only respond to things in confidence, not wanting to obviously expose any MHA that would have brought those allegations forward.

We are not about sweeping those issues under the rug, what we've seen in the past by previous administrations taking situations and have merely swept them under the rug. We are not doing that. We are doing this; we are making decisive actions doing what leaders should do in responding and making the appropriate actions and decisions allowing for a review process that should unfold in a very meaningful way.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The leader of the Official Opposition.

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

I ask the Premier again – he said they're not sexual or not physical, I accept that answer – what is the nature of the allegations against the minister? I understand privacy, he doesn't want to breach privacy or who's involved, but the nature of the allegations I think are very relevant.

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

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

The leader of the Opposition asked a question, and rightfully so, on this particular issue. I've made it publicly known when I addressed the media outside, these are not sexual by nature, they are not physical by nature but they are about behaviour. They're about conduct, Mr. Speaker.

That is where they are, that's what the allegations have been expressed to me this morning. Those are the allegations around behaviour and conduct.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The leader of the Official Opposition.

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

Last week it became known that the former minister of Education had sent an email internally to his own caucus where he said there was no greater violation. He was referring to speaking out and making me aware of harassment allegations.

Is it pertaining to that? Is this part of the reason why your minister is finally removed? Has it taken you since late last week or the middle of last week to respond to this inappropriate email that your minister sent out?

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

**PREMIER BALL:** Mr. Speaker, we must maintain confidence in the review process that we've undertaken. As I said this morning, the allegations came to me officially this morning. That's what's important here.

It's important that when all Members of this House of Assembly, Mr. Speaker, as you, in your opening comments today about the Code of Conduct, this review process is ongoing. I've notified the Commissioner for Legislative Standards. He will be accepting and willing to take on the request that we put to him. He has the responsibility and the jurisdiction to do so.

Mr. Speaker, the allegations that are being addressed today were ones that were brought forward to me this morning.



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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the leader of the Official Opposition.

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

This email sent by the former minister of Education was sent last Tuesday night after I raised questions in the House of Assembly, almost a full week ago.

Premier: Were you okay with that email? Because you still haven't made a comment if you are okay with it, or are you not? Do you condone the email or do you not?

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

**PREMIER BALL:** Mr. Speaker, as the Member opposite would know, that often during the role as a Premier, as role as a minister, role as a caucus Member, often people will do things that would be seen appropriate by some but not knowing what the full scope of what was going through people's minds at the time, Mr. Speaker, I'm not here to pass judgment. What I'm here to is commit to a review process that will be meaningful, will be thorough, will be thoughtful, Mr. Speaker, and will come out the other end with recommendations to allow this place to be a more safer place to work for all of us that are involved.

Mr. Speaker, that's the commitment that I make. I'm not going to get into the specifics of the allegation. I'm just not going to do that. We have an established process. We've engaged the appropriate people, Mr. Speaker, and we will see our way through this.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the leader of the Official Opposition.

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

As recently as this weekend, Democracy Watch has spoken out very publicly and stated that this email in itself was an act of intimidation. What I just heard – I gave the Premier just now in my question to the Premier, was to stand up and say the email was wrong and he's failed to do it.

Mr. Speaker, we seem to be having a growing problem in the government across the way in taking several days to deal with something. He says he dealt with it swiftly. This email was last Tuesday, Mr. Speaker – last Tuesday.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** I remind all Members, I will not tolerate any interruptions.

Please proceed.

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

This email was last Tuesday.

Premier, why did it take you so long to respond to this terrible email that was sent to your caucus?

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

**PREMIER BALL:** Mr. Speaker, I'll tell you one thing that's been terrible. I'll tell one you one thing that's been terrible, it brings into question the integrity of what these issues are all about. I'm trying, Mr. Speaker, to do my best not to overly politicize the recent events.

Why the leader of the Opposition would sit on relevant information for over two weeks, Mr. Speaker, which he admittedly said publicly that he had direct and indirect involvement in, why would the leader of the Opposition deliberately sit on such important information and stand in this House and question a very legitimate process that I have put in place as Premier and as Leader of this caucus?

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The leader of the Official Opposition.

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Mr. Speaker, our government has a systemic issue here, a very significant systemic issue, operating in a climate of harassment and intimidation that's simply not acceptable, and he asked me why I waited for two weeks.

I ask the Premier: In October 2017, the Minister of Justice and Public Safety was sent an email

by a Member of this House where it said: I am trusting that you will ensure that all Members of the Crown treat all MHAs with decency and respect as per our Code of Conduct.

The subject matter of the email was concerns with bullying.

Are you okay, Premier, with your Minister of Justice failing to respond to that since last October? My question is for the Premier.

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

**PREMIER BALL:** Mr. Speaker, no, I'm not okay with that. We have encouraged people to come forward with information and file complaints if it's deemed necessary to do so. If they feel they have not been treated appropriately, well, I have encouraged people to come forward.

Mr. Speaker, only a few weeks ago, a Member of the leader of the Opposition's caucus blocked a doorway for me outside of this House and the leader of the Opposition did not feel that was appropriate for him to do so. He swept it under the rug.

We are taking these incidents and these allegations very serious and we are doing something about it. We've put in place a very thorough review that can use outside experts.

Why is it that you have refused to do and acknowledge what your MHA has done outside this very House only a few weeks ago?

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

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the leader of the Official Opposition.

**MR. P. DAVIS:** We learned from the Premier just now that he's not okay with the failure of the Minister of Justice's responded email. Finally, after asking these questions for a week, he just said: I'm not okay with it. That was his first words that he said.

I point out to the Premier, and I remind him of this because I reminded him of it last night. On

January 30, I wrote a letter to the Speaker, to the Premier and to the interim leader at the time of the Third Party – not to name her – and at the time I said, and I addressed the fact that our Code of Conduct needed to be modernized, that our Human Resource Secretariat harassment and discrimination policy, that we needed to do something here in the House of Assembly.

I ask the Premier: Why did you not respond to that letter?

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

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

I'm going to take the opportunity to answer some of the points that the Member put out. I could talk about investigations that he authorized into law enforcement and Members that dare to criticism him on social media, but what I'd like to do is talk about the email and the fact that – I'm not going to get into what was said in the email. I said I did not want to talk about the complainant in that particular matter.

What I have said is I would love every opportunity to contribute to an investigation to tell anything that happened, but in the email, which I believe has been made public, I was not asked to do anything further and I comply with that request from the individual who sent me the email.

Thank you.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the leader of the Official Opposition.

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

We seem to be starting to go around a little bit in circles here because they want to throw back, why didn't I do this and why didn't I do that. We have an email we are asked to address with concerns of bullying.

I'll tell you what else the email said. He said: I thank you for your time and attention, and trust that you will expect nothing less than fair and

equitable treatment of all districts by ministers of the Crown.

The Premier acknowledges today that that email was not acceptable. We have a letter I addressed in January and I felt it appropriate to the climate that was happening in the country today, to say that we have to look at ourselves to find out what's happening. The Premier didn't respond. Here we are a week later on this very same issue, when we had concerns about an email from the Minister of Education and finally he's responding.

Premier: What's your plan to deal with this systemic issue that's happening within the walls of your own government?

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

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

Again, I have to address some of the commentary brought up by the Member for Topsail - Paradise. He talks about an allegation from October that was sent to me. You'll notice the first sentence in that email – again, I don't really want to talk about this. I indicated this in the scrum outside that I'd much prefer to do this through a process so that everybody's privacy is respected.

The first part of this email talked about a verbal discussion, and part of that verbal discussion was me advising any Member that has an issue should talk to the leader of their Party to address issues like this as well.

Again, I put that back to the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

Thank you.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the leader of the Official Opposition.

**MR. P. DAVIS:** I don't see that anywhere in the email, Mr. Speaker. It does say here to the minister, you said you've never seen me so upset, and you're correct.

Mr. Speaker, it's clear that the seriousness of this was made to the government. In the whole time when I asked the Premier last week when did he become aware, he continued to give the same answer.

I'm going to ask the Premier again: When did you first become aware that there were issues of conduct and behaviour by ministers in your own Cabinet? Premier, when did you first become aware?

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

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

I've indicated on numerous occasions that I don't prefer to have this play out in the public. I don't think it's helpful to any of the parties involved. Apparently the Member for Topsail - Paradise would rather go about it in this process. I would love to get into the content of a verbal discussion that I did have and anything else about it but there's a process and a place to do that, and I think that's with an independent investigation. I think there's a proper place to have this handled.

Again, I would refer to the email which talked about districts. I look forward to having every opportunity to talk about any involvement I may have had in this matter, where I was told that no further action was required.

Thank you.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The leader of the Official Opposition.

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

I ask the Premier: When did he first become aware that there were conduct and behavioural issues by his own ministers?

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

**PREMIER BALL:** Mr. Speaker, last Wednesday morning I was approached by an MHA. We dealt with that, as I just mentioned. This morning, there were more complaints that

came forward from MHAs of our caucus. This is when I first became aware of the issues.

Mr. Speaker, I think when the leader of the Opposition just made mention about acting on things, we acted on these things very promptly and put in place, keeping in mind that all those involved needed to be or the complainants would need to be very comfortable with the situation.

Mr. Speaker, I will tell you I've met with caucus on numerous occasions, I've met with the MHAs involved on numerous occasions. Even last night at a late hour, I reached out to the leader of the Opposition that he just made mention to. I've also reached out to the Leader of the Third Party.

Respecting the workplace that we live in, Mr. Speaker, and work in – what I'm committed to do is improving the working conditions of every MHA and every public sector worker that we have in this province.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The leader of the Official Opposition.

**MR. P. DAVIS:** Mr. Speaker, the Premier maintains he didn't learn until last week. He's had six days now since this was first raised.

I ask the Premier: When did your staff first become aware of these growing issues with the behaviour and conduct of his own ministers?

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

**PREMIER BALL:** Mr. Speaker, I will go through the sequence of events as they unfolded, just like I did when I answered the question just a few minutes ago. As I said in my last response, on Wednesday morning of last week I was approached by an MHA who filed a complaint about a Member of our Cabinet and our caucus.

We took the appropriate action; we took prompt action, Mr. Speaker. By the end of the day, decisions were made. Again, this morning when I was approached with a complaint, we dealt with it promptly, making sure that the proper review process is in place and allowing the

experts that would need to be involved, the outside expertise would be available to the Commissioner to make sure we work our way through this, and come out the other end with recommendations that will make this place a better place to work.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The leader of the Official Opposition.

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

To be clear, I'm not asking the Premier at which point in time a complaint was received. My question to the Premier earlier in Question Period was when did he first come aware. He talked about when a complaint was made. I just asked now when did staff become aware. He's talked about when complaints were made.

My question very simply for the Premier is this: When did his staff first learn of issues, concerns pertaining to conduct and behaviour of his ministers?

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

**PREMIER BALL:** Mr. Speaker, as I've just said, is that the first official allegation was brought to me last Wednesday. That's what I said. I said it openly, Mr. Speaker. And we've had public responses to those that have been involved.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, our desire would be, I think, for considering the confidence and the seriousness of the issues that we're dealing with, is that we deal with this in the appropriate manner. That is why we've reached out to the Commissioner for Legislative Standards who is in a position and has the jurisdiction based upon one of the most pivotal reports that was done in the history of this province, that being the Green report.

The jurisdiction lies with the Commissioner for Legislative Standards that is outlined in the Green report.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the leader of the Official Opposition.

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

I hear the Premier that official allegations were made first last Wednesday. What I'm asking him is when did his staff first become aware of the concerns about conduct and behaviour?

The Premier, for some reason, is refusing to answer the question, so I'll ask him this: Before last Wednesday, were you aware of any issues pertaining to conduct or behaviour of your Cabinet ministers?

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

**PREMIER BALL:** Mr. Speaker, I'll answer the question once again. I first became aware of the allegations, from an MHA, last Wednesday morning. We are dealing with this promptly. We are dealing with effectively, Mr. Speaker, keeping in mind that we must always maintain the confidence of the individuals and the integrity of the process.

I will say it again: Last Wednesday, we started to take the necessary steps to get through the thorough process.

Mr. Speaker, I got to remind the Leader of the Opposition though: Has he had one conversation with his Member that sits behind him today about his conduct outside of this very room just a few weeks ago?

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the leader of the Official Opposition.

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

So it's clear to me that the Premier well knew before last Wednesday that there were issues with conduct and behaviour of his ministers.

My question for the Premier is: Why did you not stake any action before last Wednesday when you knew there was a problem? Why did it take until official allegations were made for you to make any response?

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

**PREMIER BALL:** Mr. Speaker, this comes down to a question of integrity and here we are standing in this House with Members who were involved in this current process, Members who stood in front of the media last week and made comments of when they first became aware of this.

Mr. Speaker, how is this ever going to improve the situation that we're currently working in when we allow this type of conversation to occur in this environment, when we have in place a thoughtful, meaningful, thorough review process by the Commissioner for Legislative Standards?

We need to make sure that people are always comfortable in coming forward. And I encourage people to come forward. And we will work our way through this. We are not sweeping those issues under the rug; we are putting them out there where they belong.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the leader of the Official Opposition.

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

Mr. Speaker, there is growing concern about systemic issues that are happening within the government and regarding complaints of ministers now that have been taken out of their office.

I ask the Premier: Will these investigations be done strictly independent of each other? But now we know we have a bigger issue. Will there be a more systemic review or review of systemic issues within your own government, and how do you propose for that to take place?

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

**PREMIER BALL:** Mr. Speaker, the Member opposite talks about systemic issues, and he asked the question what is different. What is different today is the way we are dealing with them. What is different today is the way I am dealing with them as leader of this province.

In the past, these issues were never brought forward, Mr. Speaker. They were deliberately kept behind the closed doors of the previous administration. That's the difference in what we're dealing with here today. The Commissioner for Legislative Standards will have the necessary resources, will have the necessary time to deal with this effectively.

So the difference, as I said today, is we are being very open, we are being very transparent with the people of this province and we're putting it out there and making people aware, not sweeping or hiding things from the public review.

Thank you.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the leader of the Official Opposition.

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

So is the Premier saying the investigations will be made public? Is that what he's saying, it's going to be open for public review? I'm glad to hear that. But my question is that there seems to be a problem growing and mounting evidence of a systemic issue within his own government. It's important to get to the bottom of it and understand the systemic issue so it can be corrected.

So I ask the Premier: Will you allow for a larger umbrella investigation into how these things are taking place and how your government is operating?

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

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

What I said about the public comments was letting individuals, letting Newfoundlanders and Labradorians know that I had received complaints. Once the review process is finished and we come out of this with recommendations, Mr. Speaker – I must always keep in mind the individuals, the families that will be involved. It is my desire, as someone that will receive a copy of the reports, to put them out there public. That is what I want to do. But I will only do so in

consideration of everyone that's involved. The appropriate thing to do, in my mind, would be to get them out there, but I have to be mindful that other people are impacted in these processes, Mr. Speaker.

We have been decisive. Within literally hours of hearing the allegations, we had dealt with them, Mr. Speaker. We have not been sitting on them like the Member opposite did for over two weeks.

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

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the leader of the Official Opposition.

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

Can the Premier confirm that another Member of his caucus in the Liberal caucus is currently under investigation by the Commissioner for Legislative Standards?

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

**PREMIER BALL:** Mr. Speaker, other than what I've said already about the two ministers that I've been talking about, those are the only reviews that I'm aware of right now. As Members would know, anyone – you do not have to be directed there by the Premier, but anyone – can actually go and lodge a complaint with the Commissioner for Legislative Standards.

As a matter of fact, Members can be encouraged to do so proactively. They do not necessarily need to go through the Premier or to go through any other Member here; they can actually go directly there. If there's a review on the go and there's something you wanted me to check out, I'm more than willing to do that as well.

Thank you.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The leader of the Official Opposition.

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

According to a complaint that I received, I was also advised that the Premier and the Leader of the Third Party also received a copy of the complaint filed with the Commissioner, that a Member allegedly provided false, inaccurate and misleading information in an attempt to discredit a municipal council.

I ask the Premier: Are you aware of this complaint? What action have you taken with the Member involved?

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

**PREMIER BALL:** Mr. Speaker, I'll look for the details on the question and get back to the House here. It's not something that I have seen yet. I'll certainly go looking for that information.

Indeed, if this exists – I'm not suggesting that it's not – all these complaints as they come forward, we will always take them very seriously, Mr. Speaker. We will deal with them as they come forward.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The leader of the Official Opposition.

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

Those are three investigations we know of right now that the Commissioner for Legislative Standards is engaging in with Members of the Liberal caucus.

I ask the Premier: Now that there are three separate investigations, do you think you can do this in a large way and finding out what's actually happening within your government?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier for a quick response, please.

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

I think it's important that we allow the current review process to unfold. The Commissioner for Legislative Standards, when I met with him, felt that he was well equipped to do this job.

As you know, I think, as the leader of the Opposition, the Commissioner for Legislative

Standards can come in without even a request from the Premier. He can actually automatically come in because he has the jurisdiction to do that.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party

**MS. ROGERS:** Mr. Speaker, we understand that the Commissioner for Legislative Standards is investigating harassment allegations as a necessary interim process, and that the issue of harassment may also be considered by the Management Commission of the House of Assembly. In other jurisdictions, legislation is either in place or before their Houses setting out anti-harassment procedures specifically for elected officials and political staff.

I ask the Premier: Will he ask this House to direct the House of Assembly Management Commission to develop a comprehensive, anti-harassment policy for elected officials and their staff?

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

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

As people in the province would be aware, we have taken significant steps around the harassment-free workplace policy within government. Mr. Speaker, effective in June of this year, new policies would go in place – what I'm told by the jurisdictional scan that we've seen is some of the best in the country.

I think the Member opposite would know that I reached out to her late last night and have a meeting that will be scheduled some time this afternoon about how we deal with the current policies that we have in place, making sure – I believe that we need to improve the Code of Conduct. I think we make sure that we put in better workplace safety legislation and policy, harassment-free workplaces. I look forward to the meetings with both leaders later on today as we work our way through this.

I agree that the House Management Commission is one area that we need, that can play a very

effective and meaningful role as we work our way through this.

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

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

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

I would like to say to the Premier that, in fact, we need a specific policy to deal with legislators, as Nova Scotia has done, as Ontario is in the process of doing and as Alberta has done.

The Premier has indicated that the Commissioner for Legislative Standards will undertake an investigation of the formal complaints by MHAs against sitting MHAs. It is our hope the Commissioner will make public the procedure he will use to do this work so both complainants and accused will know precisely what the procedure will be.

I ask the Premier: Will he commit to providing any additional necessary resources to both the Commissioner's office and the House of Assembly Management Commission that they may need in order to do this work?

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

**PREMIER BALL:** Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. I've already said to the Commissioner that the necessary resources would be available to him. If he needs outside expert advice or experts in this field that he can use them; absolutely, the resources will be there.

Also, Mr. Speaker, we think it's timely, once again, to make sure we put in proper training, sensitivity training and so on – all important to this overall discussion that we currently are having within this House of Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, we must improve the working environment of this House of Assembly and I am committed to make sure that this is a better, safer place to work.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi for a quick question, please.

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

I ask the Premier – it seems he took seriously the statement of Democracy Watch calling the message from the Member for Mount Scio to Members of his own caucus an act of intimidation.

I ask the Premier, because it wasn't clear from what he has said so far: What exactly is the nature of the investigation that the former minister of Education and Early Childhood Development is now undergoing?

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

**PREMIER BALL:** Mr. Speaker, the specifics of the investigation – in my view at least – will be dealt with more appropriately with the Commissioner for Legislative Standards. This is not really a debate that should be had on the floor of this House of Assembly.

Keeping confidence and integrity in the system and always encouraging people to come forward, I think is extremely important that we allow the Commissioner to do the work, to do the work on these particular complaints that have come forward. He has committed to do so and the necessary resources will be available to that office.

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

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

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

The current situation has created a chill and could discourage others with a complaint of harassment or intimidation from coming forward.

I ask the Premier: What is he recommending now to individuals, whether in this House or outside of it, who want to come forward but are uncertain about what procedure to follow?



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

**PREMIER BALL:** Mr. Speaker, I just mentioned this a few minutes ago. First and foremost, always come forward. As I said in the past, silence is not an option. We continue to encourage people to step up and to come forward if they feel that they have not been treated appropriately.

There are two options that they would have available, at least from within my caucus and, hopefully, if you have to deal with this with your staff or someone else, that they can come forward to you, they can come forward to me or they can go directly to the Commissioner for Legislative Standards.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** Oral Questions has ended.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

#### Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay.

**MR. WARR:** Mr. Speaker, the Resource Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report that they have passed without amendment the Estimates of the Department of Fisheries and Land Resources, the Department of Natural Resources, the Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take the opportunity to thank the Committee Members: the MHA for Exploits, the MHA for Fogo Island - Cape Freels, the MHA for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune, the MHA for Mount Pearl North, the MHA for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave, the MHA for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi, and the MHA for Stephenville - Port au Port.

I would also like to thank our Table Officers, and I'd certainly like to show appreciation to Members who were able to assist as fill-ins

when Members of the Committee were busy with other House of Assembly duties.

I respectfully submit the report, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

Further reports by Standing and Select Committees?

Tabling of Documents.

#### Tabling of Documents

**MR. SPEAKER:** In accordance with section 19(5)(a) of the *House of Assembly Accountability, Integrity and Administration Act*, I hereby table the minutes of the House of Assembly Management Commission meetings held on February 13 and March 14, 2018.

Notices of Motion.

#### Notices of Motion

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

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

I move the following private Member's resolution:

BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House support the introduction of a Legislature-specific harassment policy, similar in principle to the policy in effect in the Nova Scotia provincial legislature, where elected representatives and their staff are held responsible for inappropriate conduct; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this hon. House, through the introduction of a Legislature-specific harassment policy, recognize all forms of harassment, including bullying, cyberbullying and intimidation of all forms; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this hon. House develop this Legislature-specific harassment policy through the Privileges and Elections Committee of this House in consultation with all Members and employees of the House and with independent groups who

have experience and expertise in handling harassment complaints.

Seconded by the Member for Conception Bay South.

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

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

The private Member's resolution read by the Member for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune is the one that we will debate on Wednesday, Private Members' Day, in accordance with the Standing Orders.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

Further notices of motion?

The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

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

I give notice that I will ask leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act To Amend The Financial Administration Act, Bill 11.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Thank you.

I give notice that I will ask leave to introduce a bill entitled, An Act Respecting The Protection Of Intimate Images, Bill 12.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

Further notices of motion?

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

### Petitions

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

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

School aged children are walking to school in areas where there are no sidewalks, no traffic lights and through areas without crosswalks which put the safety of these children at risk;

THEREFORE we, the undersigned, call upon this House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to ensure the safety of all children removing the 1.6 kilometre busing policy where safety is an ongoing concern.

Mr. Speaker, this is a petition that I continue to bring to this House. It's a very important petition to people in my area. I have schools in my area, especially the new school in Torbay where it's right on the main road, and there are 17,000 cars a day that travel along this route.

Mr. Speaker, there are no sidewalks. Now at this time of year it's not too bad because there is a bit of room to walk but during the winter months when the snow clearing is done, there's very little room. There are areas where there's probably less than a foot that you can walk and this is very unsafe.

I call upon government to think about the safety of children. I understand there's a policy in place and I understand the reason for the policy but in some cases where there are high traffic areas and children are really at risk, this is something that we need to address and I call on government to address it.

Thank you very much.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Further petitions?

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

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

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

WHEREAS opioid addictions is a very serious problem affecting many individuals and families in our province and the Bell Island area is no exception; and

WHEREAS the effects of these problems have implications that are negatively impacting many people old and young; and

WHEREAS support and treatment programs have been proven to break the cycle of addiction and have helped many into recovery;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to establish a Suboxone methadone treatment plan for Bell Island which would include a drug addictions counsellor at the hospital and a drug awareness program in the local school.

And as in duty bound your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this is probably the fifth time I've gotten to speak to this and I have hundreds of these. That's how important this issue is, not only on Bell Island as part of my district, but across this province of ours. We've had multitudes of discussions and organizations weigh in on the issue here and things that need to be done. No doubt, what's being proposed here is something that could become a pilot that could be used in other jurisdictions within this province, in other communities, in other regions to address that issue.

The particular issue we have with Bell Island is because of its isolation, and while it has a hospital there that gives us the opportunity to actually be able to offer onsite services because it has all the other amenities and professional services, it just lacks an actual program where Suboxone and methadone treatment could be put in play for residents on Bell Island who have addictions issues, and also have an addictions counsellor at the hospital.

We have a multitude of staff there that come from various backgrounds: social workers, nurses, doctors, LPNs, all the other specialists we have, but we don't have a particular expertise to deal with another part of our health issue that

have some major challenges. Not only is it physical health, but it's also mental health.

So what's being proposed here is to develop a plan. It's not overly costly, because all we're talking about is developing a plan that can work within the infrastructure of the existing system. The bricks and mortar already exist. The supports that would be necessary would exist.

We just need a particular individual who has that skill set, who can help coordinate all those efforts and ensure that the services that are necessary, but the interventions particularly, would be offered in a timely basis, in-house. That would make it more conducive to people being able to not be reliant on drugs and be able to get the proper treatment and get into recovery.

While we're doing that, we're saving money. Because this becomes costly when people from Bell Island have to travel to St. John's, taking away potential recovery time and counselling time that could be used for residents here in the Northeast Avalon.

So, Mr. Speaker, I'll have an opportunity to present this again, to talk about some of the things that are trying to be done by the people of Bell Island to address this. I do ask government to seriously consider putting something in play.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Further petitions?

The hon. the Member for Ferryland.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present the following petition on behalf of the residents of my district.

Mutton Bay Bridge, located in Trepassey area, is approximately 50 years old. In 2015, an inspection identified significant structural issues with both the substructure and superstructure portions of the bridge. This inspection urgently recommended replacement and rehabilitation for significant maintenance and repair.

Therefore we petition the House of Assembly as follows:

We, the undersigned, call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to immediately address the most serious issues that impact the lives and safety of the travelling public and make it a priority for the upcoming construction season.

Mr. Speaker, this is an issue I brought up before in this hon. House. Speaking with the residents and messages I've received, and viewing the piece of infrastructure with them, there are concerns that relate back to – the inspection was done in late 2015, with a call for immediate rehabilitation, specifically related to the base and guide rails of the piece of infrastructure, with a view, within I think it was two years, to replace that piece of infrastructure.

We have made representation to the current minister and to the department in regard to immediate repairs, and as well a request has gone in from the residents in regard to some signage and some other identification maybe on the instability of the rails on the actual structure, to ensure that the general public are aware of that and safety is of the utmost importance.

So that request has gone to the minister. We certainly hope they're going to respond to that. The minister, as well, when they announced the Roads Program, I also had a discussion with the minister. And while there was no commitment, he did say that they would look at later in the summer, looking at a possible tender to see what the cost would be, see if there was money there that we could actually do the rehabilitation and actually do the replacement that's required.

I do recognize that, but I certainly urge government and the minister to deal with the immediate concerns that have been brought forward by the residents, look at signage and what needs to be put there for the safety of the general public. This construction season, let's move forward and replace that for the safety and benefit of all the residents, and all the tourists that travels through that section of the Irish Loop.

Thank you very much.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Further petitions?

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

Orders of the Day.

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

### Orders of the Day

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole on Ways and Means to consider a resolution relating to the advancing or guaranteeing of certain loans made under *The Loan and Guarantee Act, 1957*, Bill 6.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The motion is that I do now leave the Chair for the House to resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole on Ways and Means.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

This motion is carried.

On motion, that the House resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole, the Speaker left the Chair.

### Committee of the Whole

**CHAIR (Warr):** Order, please!

We are now debating the related resolution and Bill 6, An Act To Amend The Loan And Guarantee Act, 1957.

### Resolution

"That it is expedient to bring in a measure further to amend *The Loan and Guarantee Act*,

1957, to provide for the advance of loans to and the guarantee of the repayment of bonds or debentures issued by or loans advanced to certain corporations.”

**CHAIR:** Shall the resolution carry?

The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

**MR. OSBORNE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Today, we're bringing forward amendments to *The Loan and Guarantee Act, 1957* under which the Stephenville Airport Corporation loan guarantee falls, and that's what we're speaking about today.

The provincial government is actively working directly with community partners such as municipalities and industry organizations to support greater economic activity in all regions, and this includes the Stephenville Airport Corporation.

The corporation currently serves commercial air traffic, provides technical stop services and has two runways, a fuel farm and operations terminal, a hanger and a cargo building. The summer season, which is quickly approaching, is the biggest commercial traffic season for the airport with seasonal flights programs offered by Sunwing Airlines, Porter Airlines and Air Saint-Pierre, a year-round operator, as well as Provincial Airlines.

Mr. Chair, in January of 2018, we were pleased to learn the Stephenville Airport would be getting \$1 million worth of upgrades to its instrument landing system from NAV Canada, a not-for-profit corporation that owns and operates Canada's civil air navigation systems. The upgrade will allow Stephenville to remain as an emergency or alternate landing site for trans-Atlantic flights.

Mr. Chair, myself and the Member for the Port au Port region just recently met with the Airport Corporation in Stephenville and had a very productive meeting. They're very optimistic about their future. One of the valuable services that the airport provides is that it is an alternate landing facility. For people who don't really know what that means, it means that if we're

receiving a flight in St. John's, they have to designate another airport as an alternate landing site. Sometimes that's Gander or depending on the size of the plane, for example, it may be Stephenville. If Gander is receiving a flight, oftentimes Stephenville will be named as the alternate site, or Halifax even, they'll name Stephenville as an alternate landing site.

Commercial airlines, any airline, whether it's military or commercial airlines, need an alternate landing site in order to receive permission from NAV Canada to land at the airport of their choice. Without an alternate site, Mr. Chair, in the event of an emergency at the airport or in the event of some other situation which prevents them from landing at the airport of choice, they need an alternate site. So the value of Stephenville Airport to the province and to Atlantic Canada is much larger I believe than what many people realize because it is an alternate landing site for so many flights that are coming to this province or even to Halifax.

Mr. Chair, in January of this year, Porter Airlines announced that it would double its Stephenville schedule from 50 flights in 2018, featuring new spring and fall services to Halifax. By extending the loan guarantee until 2019, the provincial government is strengthening its commitment to supporting the Stephenville Airport in the short term as it continues to work towards the goals set out in its business sustainability plan, with support from the Town of Stephenville.

Part of that plan is attracting new customers to the area. Part of that plan, Mr. Chair, is servicing some of the military flights that they currently service. A large part of the plan is providing fuel to flights that are coming from the States and going overseas carrying military personnel.

Mr. Chair, it is a valuable airport to the region. It's a valuable airport for the province. It's for that reason that this government has seen fit to extend the loan guarantee, provide the loan guarantee in the first place but to extend it this year.

Mr. Chair, the corporation has worked to diversify in areas of business to remain viable. Recent contract extensions with Memorial University, the SERT program and with NAV

CANADA highlight their approach. They feel very optimistic at Stephenville Airport that things are getting better for them. They're becoming more profitable. With this loan guarantee, they've been paying on the loan guarantee. They've had the ability to do that.

They faced some challenges last year, Mr. Chair, but they've overcome and are continuing to overcome those challenges allowing them to continue to put their plan in place to allow them to become more viable. Our focus remains on working with community partners, such as the Stephenville Airport Corporation, to drive sector and industry growth to better diversify the provincial economy. Government is going to continue to work with the Stephenville Airport Corporation and the Town of Stephenville to determine the long-term viability of the airport going forward.

I look forward to support of this bill from my colleagues in the House. As I said, it's a very important bill because it's important to the Stephenville area, it's important to the economy of Stephenville. We're optimistic that the measures that the Stephenville Airport Corporation are undertaking and continue to undertake are adding to the viability of the airport.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Ferrysland.

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

I'm pleased to rise today to speak to Bill 6, An Act to Amend the Loan and Guarantee Act. The minister just went through some of the intent in regard to the loan guarantee related to Stephenville Airport. I'm somewhat familiar with this. As the former minister of IBRD we went through this process as well, in regard to approval of an extension of the loan guarantee.

This particular bill, Bill 6, will look at taking from today's date and I think moving to March 31, 2019, in regard to the actual loan guarantee. I know we debated twice, I remember in 2016 – I think it might have been the last time we did in

May and December. At that time as well, we certainly spoke in support of a loan guarantee to the Stephenville Airport Corporation.

My understanding is the bill doesn't change the amount of guarantee; it simply extends it, as I said, to March 31, 2019. I think the amount guaranteed is for \$900,000.

When we debated this first – back in 2016 we had debated it. We had a discussion about the sustainability of the airport, the plan, different activities that were being looked at, the ongoing review of the airport's operations. Certainly, to look at the airport as a centre of training, safety and emergency response training, the options and how we continue to advance a significant piece of infrastructure, which has quite a history, but how again today we can take total advantage – as we possibly can – of that facility.

There was some ratification made to this, as I said, over the years. Bill 6 is moving to extend the loan guarantee out to March 31, 2019. The amount is not changing. Stephenville Airport will continue to be operational to pursue its interests and try and expand on activities it has there. It's guaranteeing the loans that are currently on the books, is my understanding. Should the guarantee be called, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador will incur those expenditures. That's the reason for this bill and for the piece of legislation.

The reason for this is, as I said, should it be called, the guarantee would be called and the province would have to fulfill the actual payment. That's what we're doing here today, making that commitment or extending the commitment that already exists. That would have to go here to the House. That's why it comes here to the Legislature for this particular act to amend the *Loan and Guarantee Act* as there are provisions in it for a specific time frame, and that time frame is up to elapse. So this would allow it to extend, as I said, out to March of 2019.

The payment is what's often referred to as a statutory expenditure. It is not contained – is my understanding – in the approved budget but would be paid through a subheading in the Consolidated Revenue Fund, because actually it is not a budget expenditure but there needs to be

legislative authority to fill the guarantee should it be called. That's why we do it here in the House in this particular fashion.

Normally, we'd go through Estimates. The budget is debated here and it would be voted on, but we're going through a process here in regard to a legislative process. That's exhibited here through Bill 6.

This has gone through a couple of iterations in approving and recognizing the importance of it to the Stephenville Airport to make sure that guarantee is there, and this is a process to extend on that. It certainly is important to Stephenville Airport and important to the region, the ability to remain open. I'm happy to support and continue to enhance and increase their operations.

We know there have been some challenges in the past in regard to the airport itself. Some of the challenges in operations dating back to when it was first built. The American influence and trying to continue that and the service it provides. It's certainly important. As I said, it's a significant piece of infrastructure.

In 2016, I think the last time we had the debate here, there was some discussion with the then minister of Finance. There were talks about a business plan for the Stephenville Airport Corporation. I think that was completed. It would be nice to hear some of the comments that were made in that report and how the current government is moving forward to address some of those and I guess support them; move a business plan and support it going forward.

There was also a discussion at the time about the use of the airport, whether it was from a military perspective, innovation or other opportunities that were there. I'd like to hear if any of those have been explored with the corporation since that time, since we had that discussion back in the House of Assembly and what some of the results were. As well, what some of the opportunities that – we heard a lot about *The Way Forward* plan, what's in there in regard to dealing with this sector of the province, this piece of infrastructure and how it can be enhanced and how does it fit into that plan.

As I said when I got up, we support this. It's a process we go through every so often to look at

supporting the Stephenville Airport. This loan guarantee allows the operation to continue to function and, hopefully, through initiatives of the private sector and through government creating an environment for that facility to grow and expand, it's certainly what we'd all like to see.

On this side, we support the minister in regard to Bill 6.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for St. George's - Humber.

**MR. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It's great to get up to speak on this motion here today in the House. Although I don't represent the District of Stephenville - Port au Port where the airport is located, the presence of the airport has an impact on the district that I represent as well. So I just want to take a few minutes, I won't take my full time probably, but I just wanted to take a few minutes to talk about why I support this motion and why I support the airport and why I think it has a future.

First of all, Mr. Chair, the infrastructure at the airport is second to none. It's a very positive thing that this airport has going for it. As many people will know, many people listening at home will know, this airport was put in place as part of an American Air Force base during World War II.

It's one of the largest airports in the world; it can handle some of the largest aircrafts in the world. The minister had talked about how it is an alternative airport for many flights from Gander or Deer Lake, or St. John's or Halifax, but many people may know that – just to give a sense of the scale of the airport, at one point, it was an alternative landing site for the space shuttle. It's one of the largest facilities in the world and the infrastructure there is something that we have and we should make the most of, Mr. Chair.

I'm very encouraged that the airport board is looking at ways that they can take advantage of this infrastructure that they have. One of the things they're doing is they're looking at providing a place where fuel stops can happen.

Because they have the possibility to land some of the largest aircrafts in the world, particularly military flights that are going across the Atlantic can stop there, refuel and leave pretty easily. So they are pursuing those possibilities in terms of military flights, and I think that's a very strategic sort of approach to the future of the airport.

The other thing I think that's very positive about this airport and I think part of the possibilities for the future of this airport is search and rescue. I think the location of this airport provides a large scope of coverage for any search and rescue operation that we are located there. I think that's something we, as a province, and myself and the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port are interested in pursuing. We've talked to people within the department of industry, trade and innovation about as well.

That's another sort of positive aspect, another reason why I think this motion here to provide the loan guarantee is important. It allows the airport to explore some of the possibilities there.

Another reason for optimism about Stephenville Airport is the training facilities that are already there and the possibilities that other training facilities might want to locate there. If you look at the SERT Centre, which is the Safety and Emergency Rescue Training Centre of the Marine Institute, it's located at the airport there in Stephenville; it takes advantage of some of the facilities that are available. I talked to people who work at the centre and they're very positive about the future of the centre and the type of training and type of work that they do there.

I think there are opportunities for further development of military training there and maybe a possibility of other search and rescue type programs with the College of the North Atlantic as well. So I think there are possibilities where the training that can happen at this centre is a possibility as well.

The other thing why I think this piece of legislation and extending this loan guarantee and allowing the airport to continue to explore other options is I think we have a lot of possibilities in this area, the whole Bay St. George South and Bay St. George area. I think that depends on having a package of infrastructure there that

allows us to take advantages of economic opportunities that might be there.

We've got the former Port Harmon, which is also part of the American base facility that was there. A new group has taken that over and they've rebranded it the Port of Stephenville, and I think that, combined with the airport, combined with some of the other infrastructure and transportation facilities that are in the area provide a package that is attractive to investors and businesses who are looking for somewhere to locate with those facilities. So I think that's very positive for the airport as well.

So I just wanted to add my voice to those who are supporting this motion. I've met with the Airport Authority a number of times and I've very encouraged about their approach to the future of the airport, and I just want to say I support this motion and I support the Stephenville Airport.

Thank you very much.

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

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Cape St. Francis.

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

I'm just going to have a few words on this today. I know that we are going to support this motion, and it's very important to the Stephenville area. It's a part of the province perhaps that with a good business plan and a good outlook that this airport can bring some new things to the region.

The Member who was just up a few minutes talked a little bit about what I want to talk about. The airport itself has one of the largest runways and can accept world-class planes. Sometimes if you look at some of the airports that are around – the runway, I know St. John's just recently expanded theirs, but there are some crafts, especially military crafts that can't land there. So Stephenville would be a great spot to be able to – because anytime any of these aircraft or anything is coming to the region it brings economics to the whole area, whether it's fueling an airplane, whether it's servicing the airplane. It could be something from food supply



or anything at all. So the more impact we can have to the Stephenville Airport, I'm sure that it will be great for the whole area.

Right now, in the world today, I know there are some large military crafts that have a problem landing here in St. John's. With an airport in our area – I know the Member for the Stephenville area is there now. I don't think you get as much fog and stuff as we do here in St. John's, so it may be another reason why that airport could be used. I know Gander has a couple of long runways also.

Search and rescue is always a huge part of who we are as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. I know, again, that would be another great area that we could be able to use and expand what we have already in the province. I'm not too sure, I know when we debated this back a little while ago – we debated it back in, I think it was 2016, and we debated in May and December. There were also talks back then about a business plan that needed to be put forward and what we were doing in the area to make sure that we get the most and the best that we can get out of this facility.

Mr. Chair, I had the experience of going out and looking at their training centre. I had a son, actually, who went to school out in Stephenville as part of SERT and training to be a firefighter. The facility out there, when I looked at it, it was a fantastic area. It was second to none.

The training that's done out there is great, it's unbelievable. Mr. Chair, I can remember back when I used to look up to the Torbay airport – and it caused a huge amount of problems at the time. They had this big tank up there they'd catch on fire and drive all this smoke up in the air and stuff like that. We later learned down the road there were a lot of contaminants in that.

The solvent they were using to put out the fire was called p floss at the time. That's caused a huge problem in my area because it caused contamination in the ground; it went down to the ground. There's a huge issue right along the airport fence over there now with this thing called p floss in some of the rivers.

I saw the tank that they used out in Stephenville and it's massive. It's pretty impressive when you

look at what they do out there for training. I know there are a lot of people interested in becoming a firefighter. I would imagine the school is pretty well packed all the way through.

If you look today, I know young people that went out and did this course. Some are hired in Alberta right now in different projects. I know young people that are working at Long Harbour now and went and did this course at the same time that I was out there. It's a great training facility. It has all the parts to be a great training facility. Maybe that's another part that I know when the Member for Stephenville gets up – maybe he'll discuss what the business plan is out there.

Again, anything we can do to expand anything in the province – at that time when I was out, I was very interested to know there were people from all over Atlantic Canada that came to that training course, not just Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Actually, there was a couple there from Nova Scotia. The facility itself, the certification out there is recognized I think right across Canada as one of the top areas to do that.

Again, it's an important facility and we have to support it. It would be great to see the things we can do to probably increase revenues at that airport and make sure it is prosperous. I'm not sure, but I arrived in Deer Lake this year and I was amazed by the amount of traffic that was in Deer Lake. I'm not sure what the usage is right now at the Stephenville Airport and where it is, but anything we can do as a government to promote any area of the province.

I'm sure the Members out in that area want to do what they can to advocate on behalf of the airport to this government and to all of us here to make sure the facility stays in place. Like I said, it's a world-class facility. There are needs for it right around the world when it comes to military use or search and rescue. It's a great area for search and rescue.

Any revenue that does generate through the airport has a trickle-down effect. What it does, it'll trickle down to local businesses. It'll trickle down – any time you see activity at a facility, you can always see there's going to be – whether it's the fuel. The fuel may require that the truck

comes and then the truck needs service, too. So there are tires – anything that you can do.

It's very important that there's a good business plan put in place. It's important that the airport is supported by this government, which we're doing here today. I don't think there's going to be any Member or anyone vote against this today because it's a good opportunity. That's really the thing that I hope through the airport authority out there and whatnot, that we take advantage of every opportunity that becomes available to this airport.

It's a region of our province; I know the Stephenville area. There's a lot of activity there in Stephenville. I remember one time I went out to Stephenville, I had to go to a hockey tournament. I was impressed with the number of businesses that were in the area, and it offers everything.

Also, I know the airport is a major, major part of that whole area. So it's important for any region of our province, when there is a facility like an airport or anything in that area, that we support it and we make sure the mechanisms are put in place so that it survives. It's important to every person in that region. The trickle-down effect it has to businesses in the area is amazing.

As an Opposition, I'm sure we will be supporting this motion. I just say to the Member, when we did this debate before – and I can remember doing the debate – we talked about a business plan and the importance of what that business plan looked like so that people in the area would know the future investments or anything else may come to the area, to make sure there is – to understand: Listen, this facility is alive, it's well. It's important we show the whole area that the airport has the confidence of government and its officials to say that this area is going to be a place where business is going to be done, and that government supports it and we all support it.

You know what, the big thing about anything like this, I'm sure all persons in this province, we support each other and we're huge people that do that.

So I think this motion today is going to be passed and the loan guarantee extended to when

it needs to be extended because it's an important thing for the region and of the province. I know I will be supporting it and I'm sure our caucus will too.

Thank you very much.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

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

I'm happy to stand here today and speak to Bill 6, which is dealing with the extension of the loan to the Stephenville Airport; something we first talked about in this House in November 2016. I think we talked about it two years before that actually, but the last time we spoke about this was in November 2016 when at that time, once again, we had a request for an extension with regard to the loan, extending the expiry date. At that time it was to extend the expiry date to March 31, 2018, and now it's to extend the expiry date to March 31, 2019.

I think it's extremely important that we support this bill. My colleagues who've already spoken have made extremely good points. I think we really need right now to be in this province doing whatever we can to support the smaller communities, the rural communities to make sure economic development for these communities is supported as much as possible by government as we can do. We know we have a board out there in charge of the airport that is extremely involved in finding various projects, various activities that can happen at the Stephenville Airport and are being very creative in things they are coming up with.

The Airport Corporation is extremely important in the overall economy there. When we first talked about this here in this House, some of us weren't even here at the time. The House talked about the fact that the airport was on the verge of bankruptcy and needed financial assistance at that time from the government.

Studies were done, analyses were done. I understand the government hired Ernst & Young to review the financial situation. They did recommend filing for bankruptcy protection. Again, time to restructure, which the board did.

They certainly have put a lot of effort through their restructuring over the years into finding ways in which to keep the airport alive.

I think it's extremely important that those efforts are recognized here by this House. It has played an extremely important role in the past, in the life of the West Coast, and I think the possibilities are still there for that. We have to be looking for ways in which new employment opportunities are created. I think that's extremely important in order to keep our younger people here in the province and keep our younger people on the West Coast of the province.

We have to stop the drain from different parts of the province to the Avalon Peninsula. We have to make sure there are possibilities throughout our wonderful province. I think certainly looking at the Stephenville Airport as part of that development is more than warranted.

We may disagree on various political positions, but I think we all have a desire to see our population grow, which it isn't doing right now. It's shrinking. It's been shrinking every year for the past few years. We want to look at employment growing, which it isn't. That too is shrinking. We want to see unemployment shrink as employment grows, and that isn't happening.

Right now, in the documents that are part of the budget, the book called *The Economy* paints a pretty straightforward picture in our province right now. The facts come straight from the Department of Finance that all the things that would be indicators of growth in the province are actually going downwards as indicators. The things that would be really bad for economic growth are increasing such as unemployment and our gross domestic product going down.

We have so many indicators that really should concern us, negative indicators. The things that we can do to help something like the Stephenville Airport and the airport authority to come up with plans and projects that will not only be good for the area – they just can't be things that are going to be good for a small company, but not good for the overall area. They have to be projects that are good for the people of the area, especially of Stephenville, but there's a much larger area that depends on the

economy of Stephenville. Stephenville is a hub. Increasing that potential so that the people of Stephenville, the businesses of Stephenville and the people and the businesses that are part of that hub all benefit from what's going on is extremely important.

Using this time, using right now the bill to speak to this is important for us. It's important for us as a province. We don't have plans in place and this is one of the things that bother me. Government talks about its *Way Forward* but I still don't see plans that are absolutely spelled out and showing how we're going to get to where they say we're going to get.

While this is not part of a government plan, per se, and it certainly isn't, it's an opportunity for government to show that it does care about what's happening in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. It's an opportunity for government to help an area that I absolutely believe continues to have potential in this province.

There are so many businesses that could be put in place out there. Just from the perspective of tourism and the absolutely beautiful natural beauty that we have and the history of that area, the history of more than one culture living together in that area over the years – several cultures living together over the years – there's so much that could be done. Who knows in that way, what, from the tourism perspective, could be done at the airport as well, Mr. Chair.

Yes, I do support this bill. I'm happy to be part of voting for the Stephenville loan being extended to March 31, 2019.

Thank you.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

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

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

It's certainly a pleasure to stand and speak to this important motion before the floor of the Legislature today. Mr. Chair, as you noticed, I guess during the course of debate from the Members opposite there were quite a few of my colleagues who came over to offer words of

encouragement to me. They know how passionate I have been about not only Stephenville, being the Member and so fortunate to represent the residents of the District of Stephenville - Port au Port, but also passionate about the airport. I think many Members of our Cabinet are full-well informed of the operations of Stephenville Airport Corporation and I certainly greatly appreciate their support as well.

Mr. Chair, Stephenville Airport is a provincial asset. It is not just a regional asset; it is not just an asset to the Town of Stephenville and to the surrounding communities. Certainly it plays a very pivotal role in that regard; however, it is a provincial asset.

I say that because, as was referenced by Members and my colleague from St. George's - Humber, any time we see weather patterns that disrupt this province, which we're certainly prone to, Stephenville and the West Coast, with exception to some increased precipitation of snowfall in the winter, it certainly tends to avoid the fog. From Gander on in, you'll often see when St. John's has a bad weather, Gander will as well.

The Member for Ferryland actually did reference that. I believe that the Member for Cape St. Francis did as well, and thank you very much to both those Members for their support on this bill.

Stephenville is 97.5 per cent of the time fog-free. It's certainly amazing to live in the Town of Stephenville, some 97.5 per cent of the time fog-free. I'm just having a chuckle because I can see the smiles from some of our Members opposite as they're living in the city and, of course, used to some of the fog. But I will digress. That's certainly an important asset and an important reason why it is considered an alternate. It's considered an alternate for all of the airports in the province.

Mr. Chair, anytime an aircraft takes off it has to have two alternates. One of them has to be what's called an achievable alternate. An achievable alternate has to be a destination that is within 30-minute proximity of flying time, and this is directly where Stephenville finds itself. I referenced before when we debated this bill in 2016 in May, and again in December of

2016, Stephenville is in a very unique position in terms of Atlantic Canada. If you were to take a protractor and draw a circle, Stephenville is strategically positioned to respond to emergencies, be it in Labrador, in Quebec for that matter, and to our neighbouring provinces in Atlantic Canada in the south, Nova Scotia, PEI, New Brunswick and even the upper part of the Eastern Seaboard of the US – a very strategic position.

With respect to the operations, some of the things that the board have been doing, the Members in the Opposition – and again, I thank them for their support. The Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi just referenced it as well. Certainly Members are keenly interested in some of the business plan efforts with the Stephenville Airport Corporation.

What I can tell you, Mr. Chair, the history of Stephenville Airport puts it in the position where it requires this financial backing. This financial backing is a loan guarantee that ensures the operation can continue to be ongoing. The reason it's in that position is due to the devolution of Transport Canada. Transport Canada devolved itself of various airports all across Atlantic Canada in the 90s. In doing so, Stephenville was one of these areas that were affected. Stephenville survived for a number of years on its own and its own efforts, and then did eventually require some government support – not unlike other communities and other industries in the province.

But what I can tell you about some of the ongoing work, the increase in military traffic has just been amazing. We have two retired colonels, one with the United States Air Force and one with the Canadian Forces, who has been serving as a special advisor in Ukraine and Eastern Europe. Two of these retired colonels have been providing direct assistance to the airport board and actually recruiting some of the military traffic.

What's appealing to the military traffic, and I'm specifically talking about C-17s and C-130s, what's very interesting about them is they enjoy the landing in Stephenville due to the quick turnaround time they see. You can imagine if a military aircraft landed here in St. John's this afternoon – St. John's is a very domestically

busy, commercial, passenger-traffic airport. Stephenville on the other hand, while it does have commercial traffic and we have seen some increases there, which I'll reference in a moment, the commercial traffic and domestic travel is a lot less than that of Deer Lake, for example, and St. John's.

So as a result, the military traffic prefer to stop in Stephenville, have a quick refueling station, and move on. They've previously engaged in military training exercises there. There are some great initiatives underway right now with the Town of Stephenville's new economic development officer to increase some of the military training capacity that we have in Stephenville.

So the military traffic is one thing that has increased as a result of their business plan. We've also had some increased traffic with Porter Airlines, who offered a Christmas service this past season for the first time. Porters been around now about four or five years. Just a few months ago, they announced that due to the increased commercial and passenger traffic to the Halifax market they've doubled their flights. They've actually just about over-doubled their flights. They use to offer 23 flights a season; they're moving up to 53 flights this year.

**MR. MITCHELMORE:** Hear, hear!

**MR. FINN:** I heard support here from the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation. Certainly someone who was very positive in receiving that news. The Minister of Tourism, Culture Industry and Innovation, as well as the Finance Minister, as well as the former Finance minister, as the Premier have all been actively engaged and have all directly met with myself and the Stephenville Airport Corporation, the board members there and the mayor. So that just, I think, speaks volumes to the support and understanding of the ministers, their awareness and the significance of this bill.

Mr. Chair, in addition to our provincial government support, the municipal support has been extremely strong. The Town of Stephenville has come onboard to assist with the purchase of some equipment. We've had some great federal support, Mr. Chair. The federal government and the Member of Parliament for

Long Range Mountains, MP Hutchings, has worked with her colleagues in the federal government to ensure that we'll have a brand new ILS system installed. That is an instrumental landing system. That is something that is absolutely integral and paramount to the ongoing operation of the Stephenville Airport.

Also as mentioned, the MUN school has a SERT team, emergency response training system there. The Member for Cape St. Francis alluded to the fact that, in fact, his own son had studied at the school there. The training is bar none some of the best in the country and certainly the top in Atlantic Canada.

Recently, the Stephenville Airport Corporation renegotiated a lease for an ongoing five years up to 2020, with a five-year renewal with Memorial University for that particular place. The Airport Corporation actually just reached a brand new collective agreement with its union members at the airport. This is the first time since 2004.

In addition to that, NAV CANADA, actually, which operates in the Stephenville Airport, has just recently renewed their contract with an increase financially, I might add, as well. I think when you look at these entities to that magnitude with respect to education, with respect to NAV CANADA, the commitment from the federal government, a renegotiated union agreement with the members there, all of these things speak volumes to the continued growth the excitement and the passion that those entities have and the belief they have in Stephenville and in the Stephenville Airport.

Mr. Chair, moving forward, I personally will continue to meet with the board. I'll continue to fight for the Town of Stephenville. I'll continue to lobby my government, my Members, the Premier and others involved. The Minister of Finance, after having had his visit, is certainly looking forward to coming back and seeing some of the measures that have taken place to increase the traffic and to increase the capacity at Stephenville Airport.

Mr. Chair, with that, I will conclude. I notice I have a short moment or two left. I certainly want to thank all the Members that lent their support to the conversation today. I look forward to this bill passing unanimously.

On a personal level, as the Member representing the district, a sincere thank you to all of you understanding the importance of supporting our municipalities, no matter where they are located in this province. The Stephenville Airport supports the entire Southwest Coast. For the Minister of Justice and Public Safety, from Port aux Basques, air ambulance travels has increased. We see folks that get airlifted in from Stephenville to St. John's for various medical emergencies. Those numbers are increasing due to an aging population. Individuals come from as far as two hours away from Burgeo, from an hour drive to Cape St. George, an hour and 45 minutes down to Rose Blanche, Port aux Basques.

Mr. Chair, this is strategically located to be an asset for the entire Southwest Coast but, more importantly, an asset to the entire province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIR:** Shall the resolution carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, resolution carried.

A bill, "An Act To Amend The Loan And Guarantee Act, 1957." (Bill 6)

**CLERK (Barnes):** Clause 1?

**CHAIR:** Shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

**CLERK:** Be it enacted by the Lieutenant-Governor and House of Assembly in Legislative Session convened, as follows.

**CHAIR:** Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

**CLERK:** An Act To Amend The Loan And Guarantee Act, 1957.

**CHAIR:** Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

**CHAIR:** Shall I report Bill 6 carried without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

Motion, that the Committee report having passed the resolution and a bill consequent thereto, carried.

**CHAIR:** The Chair recognizes the hon. the Government House Leader.

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Mr. Chair, I move that the Committee rise and report the resolution and Bill 6.

**CHAIR:** The motion is that the Committee rise and report the resolution and Bill 6.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

**CHAIR:** All those against, 'nay.'

Carried.

On motion, that the Committee rise and report Bill 6 carried without amendment, the Speaker returned to the Chair.

**MR. SPEAKER (Trimper):** The hon. the Chair of Committees; the Member for Baie Verte - Green Bay.

**MR. WARR:** Mr. Speaker, the Committee of Ways and Means have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report that they have adopted a certain resolution and recommend that a bill be introduced to give effect to the same.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The Chair of the Committee of Ways and Means reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have adopted a certain resolution and recommend that a bill be introduced to give effect to the same.

When shall the report be received?

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Now.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Now.

On motion, report received and adopted.

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Health and Community Services, that the resolution be now read a first time.

**MR. SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that the resolution be now read a first time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

This motion is carried.

**CLERK:** Be it resolved by the House of Assembly in Legislative Session convened, as follows:

"That it is expedient to bring in a measure further to amend *The Loan and Guarantee Act, 1957*, to provide for the advance of loans to and the guarantee of the repayment of bonds or debentures issued by or loans advanced to certain corporations."

On motion, resolution read a first time.

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the hon. Minister of Health and Community Services that the resolution be now read a second time.

**MR. SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that the resolution be now read a second time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

This motion is carried.

**CLERK:** Second reading of the resolution.

On motion, resolution read a second time.

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Health and Community Services, for leave to introduce a bill entitled An Act To Amend The Loan And Guarantee Act, 1957, Bill 6, and I further move that the said bill be now read a first time.

**MR. SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that the hon. Government House Leader shall have leave to introduce a bill entitled An Act To Amend The Loan And Guarantee Act, 1957, Bill 6, and that the said bill be now read a first time.

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

This motion is carried.

Motion, the hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board to introduce a bill, "An Act To Amend The Loan And Guarantee Act, 1957," carried. (Bill 6)

**CLERK:** A bill, An Act To Amend The Loan And Guarantee Act, 1957. (Bill 6)

On motion, Bill 14 read a first time.

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Health and Community Services, that Bill 6 be now read a second time.

**MR. SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that the said bill be now read a second time.

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 motion is carried.

**CLERK:** A bill, An Act To Amend The Loan And Guarantee Act, 1957. (Bill 6)

On motion, Bill 14 read a second time.

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Health and Community Services, that Bill 6 be now read a third time.

**MR. SPEAKER:** It is moved and seconded that the said bill be now read a third time.

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 motion is carried.

**CLERK:** A bill, An Act To Amend The Loan And Guarantee Act, 1957. (Bill 6)

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

On motion, a bill, "An Act To Amend The Loan And Guarantee Act, 1957," read a third time, ordered passed and its title be as on the Order Paper. (Bill 6)

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

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

I call from the Order Paper, Motion 1, the Budget Speech.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Continuation of the Budget Speech.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island.



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

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

It's an honour again in this House of Assembly to stand and speak to the 2018-2019 fiscal budget that has been presented and we've been debating.

I have the privilege tonight to spend the evening with the Minister of Health and his officials as we go through the Estimates on the Department of Health and Community Services and get a real indebt understanding of the particular programs and services, the dollar figures, the impact, positively and negatively, they may have and changes that may have occurred from last night year's fiscal to this year's fiscal.

For those who may not be familiar with the Estimates process, it's an opportunity for Opposition parties, with their researchers, after going through the budget, to go line by line with the minister, and the minister has all of his key staff to ensure that any questions asked, particularly around the financing of the budget line, are explained and outlined. If there are some particular nuances that need to be clarified, that it can be done there. So there's no misconception or misunderstanding of exactly what each line means and what the differences are between what's been budgeted, what actually was used, to what was the difference between last year's budget and why the changes take place.

So it's a key opportunity for everybody in Newfoundland and Labrador to get a full understanding of exactly what each dollar figure means. We get to the exact amount that – the budget at the end of this whole process gets to be adopted by the Members of the House of Assembly. I'll have that privilege tonight, to sit down and go through the various funding sources.

Some of it is base salaries. Some of it is special project money. Some of it is research money. Some is obviously in the Department of Health. For those who may not be aware, the health authorities are obviously a big chunk because while they're arm's-length from government, they all fall under the fiscal responsibility of the minister and the department and all of the

programs and services they offer; all the specialists we have, all the doctors we have, all the health professionals in every sector that are part and parcel, the administration of equipment in most cases, and some of the other particular partnerships that are developed there.

We'll have an opportunity this evening. I'm looking forward to discussing that with the minister and his officials, and getting some better clarification. What that does lead to is then over the next number of days there may be some particular questions for further clarification that we can discuss.

Some of it then can relate to policy. The norm in Estimates is you don't too heavy into policy. It's more about the dollar figures because it's Estimates. It's about the financial bottom line and balance sheets in each of the line department or each line heading. We'll go through that tonight.

I'm hoping it does generate some particular questions around policies and how the amounts of money being invested are going to improve our outcomes when it comes to, particularly, around health care. I'm looking forward to that. We'll have that discussion, and no doubt over the next few days we'll continue to have those types of discussions.

As I said, the last time I spoke to the budget, fair is fair and you give credit where credit is warranted. You challenge where you think there's been either let down on something or no due diligence. In this case, there are a few areas here I've got to note that I think are improvements into how we address improving people's lives in Newfoundland and Labrador. By the government taking the monies they have and investing them in the right areas they get better outcomes, particularly some of the ones here that I mentioned before.

I want to go back again because I think people need to be aware that there are some positive things coming here. Particularly in the education field, and more relevant to at-risk youth, particular support mechanisms for inclusion; all the things that are relevant to issues to improving our education system for all students, administrators, teachers.

All those who are involved in the education system, but particularly also for peace of mind for parents. The ultimate is so that students themselves are comfortable, have the supports and services they need. If it's not something they need, it's something their friend or their classmate may need, or their neighbour may need, or it might be one of their siblings need to better improve the educational experience and their ability to move to the next levels in education.

We had bantered back and forth over the last number of months on what was going to happen with the recommendations from the Premier's task force on education, which the 82 recommendations, all very fluent, all reflective of the dialogue that people had, the written dialogues, the public dialogues that people had. Some of the agencies or particular interest groups that wanted to ensure their views or their issues or their recommendations were taken into account. Obviously, the quality of the people on the task force was second to none with their backgrounds. So it was easy for them to be able to take that and put it in a proper presented mechanism that outlined exactly the different things that needed to be done.

I was pleased to see at the end of it – there are three things that change when you do any process here. One is accepting there's a challenge that needs to be addressed; two, is putting in play the set of recommendations; the third, and just as important, probably more important for the outcomes, is to actually put the resources where necessary to ensure the recommendations are obtainable and will have the desired outcome.

While it's nowhere near it, we all know in five or six line departments in this government you could double their budgets and still be short in being able to provide services that people feel are needed and in some cases are instrumental if they're going to improve people's quality of life.

In education, there's no difference. We've touted here and sometimes we banter back and forth about how much money was spent over the years.

I know the Member for Topsail had mentioned it last week in his statement about at the end of the

day what you don't hear any more is schools being shut down in the morning because of mould, because of heating issues, these types of things. They were a prominent thing for years. In the '80s, '90s, even early 2000s, until we said, you know what? There are ways of offering quality education, and we have by far the best educators around. By far we have a multitude of programs and services, but to be able to provide those in an adequate setting that you get the best bang for your dollar, you have to also have the infrastructure.

I'm not always a big promotor of bricks and mortar. I still think we have enough out there in our society to be able to not reinvent the wheel or not spend money on bricks and mortar but put it better into the resource that is either the individuals that we need from a professional point of view or the extra other supports through partnerships; but, when you invest in schools you eliminate five or six of the big issues that you would have. The school can become your centre where all the other programs and services can also congregate to ensure the community has access to that.

Again, the first line of defence when we're dealing with young people and our students is that they're in a safe, caring environment, and that's conducive to learning. Well, we could do that. As we built new schools, we better used technology that we couldn't do in previous years. We've also ensured that the health of people in the school system was improved. And we also had the ability then for administrators to be able to put the design in play that would give them abilities to deal with any challenges that may be in their school system.

So over the years, we managed to invest hundreds of millions of dollars, and I mean hundreds. At one point when I was minister of Transportation and Works I think I did an assessment and we were up over three-quarters of a billion dollars, just investing in infrastructure. I say infrastructure – bricks and mortar in schools; repairs to existing schools; expansions; and building new schools. So that's substantial when you talk about that.

While that was happening, we were also investing hundreds of millions into new programs; new levels of training; new support

mechanisms; new design on use of technology in teaching methods and these types of approaches.

There's a benefit to be able to do that in education, and I think we've come a long way. I think we're in a real good place. There's still a need for some new schools in a few places. Not as relevant as they were a number of year ago. But that will come over time. There's still a need there. That hasn't changed.

I know in the last couple of years there has been a couple of schools there that are noted, that will start progressing forward over the next number of years. That's perfect, because they're in growth areas. They're in areas to replace old schools. So that ensures that quality of education can continue.

So it shouldn't be segregated to one region or one populace or one community that has a certain political affiliation. It has to be well rounded, open to everybody and justifiable by number of students, the potential for growth, the age of a school or the importance of being able to promote better education by having a new facility. I will say that was always the former administration's approach. I would be remiss to say that I haven't see that it isn't this administration's approach also to ensure if there's an area that needs an investment in infrastructure, particularly around education, that it's put on the priority list.

So I'm happy to be able to say that, and tout that I see that as a good thing in this budget. I also note here the investments that are going towards, particularly, reading specialists. In my previous life in working with officials from the Department of Education, one of the things that were noted that one of our challenges is around reading, and from a number of points. From some of the particular challenges that some students may have. Some of the areas from a geographic point of view.

From a point of view of some of the supports, or unfortunate lack thereof that they may have from a home environment, or other supports that could complement that from a community point of view that reading specialists could identify and work with particular students or groups of students, or even with other teachers in the school system or other support mechanisms that

are there to provide services for the students to ensure, at the end of the day, we improve our reading skills, that our literacy skills improve, that our outcomes improve. If you have the reading ability, the skill set there and the confidence at that level, the rest of it becomes much easier.

We all know – and we all were in class with people and we were probably, some of us the same way – the biggest challenge was being comfortable in reading in front of people, reading privately but particularly in front of people. Once that's done, once you're comfortable with it and there are new techniques, new ways of making that flow more fluidly, there are ways then of improving people's confidence levels and that the rest of the education system or the learning process flows well with that. I was pleased to see there was an extra \$2 million being allocated to do that over the next three years. That's a substantial investment as part of what we're doing there.

Then \$3.1 million allocated directly for reading specialists. The whole \$6.95 million is all part of that whole reading approach. That may not seem like a lot but when you think of it, it's not every student that has a challenge around the reading thing. It's about improving the general concept but then it's having particular supports for those who may have some challenges, and developing partnerships with some of the other supports that are in the system to be able to enhance that a little bit more.

I was pleased to see that as it went forward. I was pleased again to see after the challenges over the last number of years about the amount of money, the \$11.3 million for the Library Resources Board. Even after all the debate – and I don't want to rehash it, but I do have to rehash it for one reason. The one reason I rehash it is not to make a swipe at any government or any minister, it's to say that when the people of Newfoundland and Labrador stood up for something they believed in – and for what a lot of the populous didn't see was a valuable resource because they hadn't used it. It had been something that because they had moved on to other uses of technology or other approaches to various levels of learning or various levels of

engagement, that wasn't one of the ones that they were familiar with anymore.

When those who do use it and those who advocate on behalf of those who would need the service came out and started to outline the benefits, what it means from a financial point of view in sustaining some communities and enhancing what we do in Newfoundland and Labrador, then the rest of the society says, you know what, for the amount of money we're investing there, it's an unbelievable return. So that unified all sectors of our province here and backgrounds. Even for those people who had no bearing, no understanding of what services libraries offered any more.

Afterwards I talked to hundreds of them, as I crossed the province dealing with some of the library boards and talking to some citizens, about how people now have a better appreciation – people showed up who had never been in a library in 25 years, now showed up and didn't realize there was other services that were offered there. That it wasn't just the old days you go in, you check out a book, you brought it home, you read it, you brought it back, those type of things. So they realized libraries became a community centre and a community hub for all kinds of support mechanisms.

That was a very positive thing that came out of what could have been a very dark period when it came to literacy and sustainability, particularly in some rural areas with the libraries that were slated to close at the time. It's good to see that there's a commitment. That the anxiety that may have been with all of these volunteer boards – when you think, you were talking 80 or 90 staff, that has an impact financially, but you're also talking hundreds of volunteers and thousands of users, and dozens of municipalities who use those libraries as one of their key gathering centres and key ways of providing extra information and getting information out to citizens.

The fact that that's sustainable there is great. I know with my discussions with previous library boards keeping the core funding – keeping in mind, the core funding today of what it was three or four years ago isn't core funding anymore because the cost of overhead from expenses of salaries to insurances to

maintenance, all the other things related to it have shown that this same amount of money now is probably 15 per cent or 20 per cent less. There has to be an awareness there that while they won a battle to show the need for libraries, the impact they have on people's lives, the benefit to all residents in Newfoundland and Labrador, the next selling point is that they need to have sustainable funding that addresses their needs to expand services.

If they expand services in one side, that obviously should be able to take away some of the expenditures on another type of service that government may be responsible for. I mean, we're all cognizant of the financial situation. Even if we were at \$150 a barrel of oil or we had other revenue streams that were coming in, we still need to be cognizant of spending money where people need services, not necessarily what they'd like to have because we'd all like to have the Cadillac service but the services they need.

I'd prefer to have 50 services in a community that provide typical services for people that may or may not be the standard ones everybody else would have but would enhance their lives versus having half a dozen super services that everybody says are trend leaders and are the best in the world. Let's give people what they need, not necessarily what they want but what they need to provide a good quality of life, a good education, reduce any anxieties or stresses, give them a way to be more inclusive in their communities and then I think, as a society, we're doing well and, as a government, you're investing your money and getting a better return as part of that.

So they're the things that I saw as positive in here. I would have liked to see a better tax regime to get back to putting money back into people's pockets which, in turn, comes back into the coffers of the government, which stimulates the economy, which gives government money and the ability then to go back and spend again, and gives them an ability then to carve out exactly what their expenditures will be for that period of time and, hopefully, allocate a particular amount of money to start putting on the debt.

We need to show due diligence on the debt reduction as part of that process. So that I didn't

see and it's a bit alarming. My speciality isn't in finances, but I do know at the end of the day you have to be cognizant of your spending and you have to have a plan in play that generates enough revenues and stimulates the economy.

You can generate revenue particularly easy by upping taxes for a short period of time until people, after that, either lose their jobs and pay very little tax or no tax, or leave the province and pay absolutely none. So you have the balance there to make sure that things work properly.

That's one of the concerns I have. I'm looking forward to debate over the next month here in the House to see now once the budget is adopted how, through the Minister of Finance and some of the other line departments, Natural Resources and those particularly that can generate some monies, that policies and programs are put in play to be able to ensure that there's long-term sustainability, and that there's a plan in play to address that the economy grows, that people have faith in the economy.

I heard a disturbing note from the Small Business Association that small businesses are not confident. They figure they're going to have no growth. As a matter of fact, that they're going to regress when it comes to their ability to generate revenues and employ people. That becomes a challenge for me because we know small business, that's the heart and soul; it is what drives your economy. So if you don't have programs and services that give them confidence and ensure that the general public are going to buy or avail of their services then we got some real troubles here.

The other one – I looked at it and I'm trying to get my head around it. I'm not confident that it's going anywhere yet. It's about supporting sustainable and inclusive communities. I say there's an old cliché: You must spend money to make money. Sometimes you have to invest in some of these communities so that you can help drive the economy, you can help give people confidence.

One thing about Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, they have the innovation, they have the work ethic and they have the ability to drive the economy, create new jobs, creative

approaches and stuff. But we need to have the mechanism in play. Unfortunately, what we've seen mainly the last three years is not putting the mechanism in play; it's putting restrictions in play. That has had a detrimental effect on the small business community, the confidence of the consumer and, in fact, it's had the impact that people don't stay in rural Newfoundland because they figure their opportunities are limited because of the limited investment.

So we need to go back to the balance here. We need to make a decision. If we're going to sustain all parts of Newfoundland and Labrador, we have to give them the infrastructure. We have to give them the support mechanism. We're not saying invest millions or hundreds of millions of dollars. We're saying how do we work with particular groups in a particular area that may have a geographic draw, it could be tourism, it could be a particular mineral thing, it could be something in manufacturing, to put particular supports that will enhance the business community there, the citizens, coming up with a way of addressing that.

Mr. Speaker, I think further down I'll have an opportunity to speak to the budget again. I look forward to that.

Thank you very much.

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

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

It's always an honour to rise in this hon. House to represent the people of the beautiful and scenic District of Lewisporte - Twillingate. This is my first opportunity to speak to the budget.

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

**MR. D. BENNETT:** As I didn't get an opportunity to speak last week, I just want to start off by – as well know, April 15-21 was Volunteer Week and I just want to commend the great work of all the volunteers in my district, from running sport organizations to church groups, service organizations. A lot of things that happen within our community would not be possible without the dedication and the

commitment of these volunteers. I just want to give a big shout-out to all of those.

In my previous role, Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned before in the House, I was the director of recreation and tourism in the Town of Lewisporte and I had the honour of working with the people of Lewisporte for 25 years in that role. During that time, I also had the privilege of serving as the president of Recreation Newfoundland & Labrador and also on many other boards, both regionally, locally and provincially.

Volunteers, in whatever capacity I worked in, always was a big part of my job. I relied on them heavily for different events and activities that I organized over the years and also the work that happened within our community. As I said, they're invaluable.

During Volunteer Week, I had an opportunity to attend a couple of events. First of all, there was a volunteer appreciation day in Twillingate. That was an event where the staff recognized the volunteers from the Twillingate hospital and the New World Island clinic. They had a sit-down supper where approximately 100 volunteers were present and acknowledged for all their contributions and the work they do at both the clinic and hospital.

Then on April 21, the last day of Volunteer Week, I had the opportunity to take part in the 40th anniversary of the Kinsmen Club of Notre Dame, the building which is in Lewisporte. It was a great evening of fellowship. Some of the founding members were there, Mr. Speaker, that got up and talked about how the Kinsmen Club has been so involved in the community and the development of different programs and initiatives, always there to help people in need throughout the full region.

Every so often, every couple of years, the Kinsmen Club always unveil a little plaque to show the contributions that they made within the community. At this event in the 40 years that the service organization have operated their own building, they have put back over \$3.4 million back into –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** How much?

**MR. D. BENNETT:** \$3.4 million in the 40-plus years. That has helped a lot of people, a lot of families and a lot of groups in need. I just felt it was important to identify them.

Mr. Speaker, also another volunteer group that had an event last Thursday – that myself and the Minister of Tourism was unable to attend, but was able to send our greetings on – the Durrell Museum, in the community of Twillingate, unveiled a new display featuring the great auk. The great auk is a bird that was extinct back in the mid-1980s. A gentleman by the name of Paul Summerskill who originally is from Ontario but had a summer home in Twillingate, did 11 concrete replicas of the great auk. Like I said, the display was unveiled this past weekend. The work of this museum is all done by volunteers.

I do welcome my colleagues, and also anyone that's listening today, to visit Durrell Museum and all the other great attractions in Twillingate and within my District of Lewisporte - Twillingate for some of the great attractions. You definitely will not be disappointed.

Mr. Speaker, I also serve as the parliamentary secretary to the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development. I've had the honour of serving in that role for a little over two years. I'm going to talk about some of the great things in budget 2018-19 that's happening within this department that has been having a very positive impact on the lives of our residents.

Mr. Speaker, the investment in this year's budget speaks to our government's continued commitment to building on our future. Our focus is on stability and discipline when it comes to fiscal management, while finding ways to invest in communities and services that the people of our province need.

For the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development we have focused on providing the valuable programs and services available from our department. *Building for Our Future* addresses our province's economic, social and fiscal challenges. It is a way forward that is methodical, fair and responsible, and recognizes that all stages of life are a priority of our government.

*Budget 2018* reflects on our commitment to managing our fiscal situation, protecting value programs and services, getting better outcomes out of our investments and creating an environment which supports economic development and job creation.

Community groups are important partners in our delivery of services to the people of our province. These organizations are often relied upon to deliver a number of critical services to the individuals and communities they support. I'm very pleased our operation of funding has been maintained for our community groups in the 2018-2019 fiscal budget. This amounts to approximately \$120.7 million for groups and community organizations for operational funding, as well as support projects and programs that are delivered to the residents of our province.

As we indicated in *The Way Forward*, our government remains committed to implementing a multi-year approach for community grants. Only last Tuesday, Mr. Speaker, I had the honour of attending that announcement with our minister and the Premier where 22 organizations were identified for multi-year funding. I had the opportunity to speak to three or four groups after the announcement. I must say, the announcement was something they felt was long overdue and it was very well received.

Mr. Speaker, the safety and protection of our children and youth is an important focus of government. It is our goal that the advancements made in child protection will help ensure children and youth are receiving the best services possible. We are continuing the ongoing work of building a revitalized child protection system that is responsible to the priority needs of our children and youth, as well as continuing to make significant progress in creating a culture of accountability, excellence and consistency across all programs in all regions.

The protection and healthy development of our children is paramount to the department and to the services that we provide. That is why we are always monitoring and assessing our services. We know child protection is a critical and a challenging area in its service delivery.

Every day child protection social workers in our province work to assess the safety of children and to make decisions to ensure their protection. When children in care are unable to return safely to their parents, those children require another permanency plan which may include adoption.

Mr. Speaker, *Budget 2018* will provide \$395,000 over the next two years to provide dedicated resources to develop profiles of children and youth who are waiting to be profiled for adoption and complete the matching and approval process. We want to ensure we match children who are eligible for adoption with loving and supportive families. Without an alternate permanency plan such as adoption, children and youth may age out in care without a permanent connection with their family and other great supports.

I want to also touch on a notable change we made recently. Last December, we made recent amendments to the *Child and Youth Protection Act*, which provides the legislative authority for the reporting of critical injuries and child deaths to the Advocate's office, which will enable the office to complete the work it is mandated to do. We work closely with the Advocate to develop these amendments and ensure they fully address the Advocate's role in the protection of children and youth.

We are also working diligently to update the *Child and Youth Care and Protection Act*, which is important legislation for our government. This update to the legislation will be based on our consultations and policy reviews.

Mr. Speaker, we all recognize that improved health outcomes start with healthier, more active lifestyles. In *The Way Forward*, our government committed to increase physical activity by 7 per cent, reduce obesity by 5 percent and reduce the province's smoking rate by 4 per cent by 2025. To help achieve these goals, \$200,000 has been allocated for the Carrot Reward program, which encourages Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to increase their daily physical activity.

Mr. Speaker, this is a free app to promote healthy living. Since I've been in government, I've been using the app. It's something you can put on your mobile device. It tracks your steps. Also, it sends out healthy eating reminders and

questionnaires to evaluate your own health and your own outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, since the program that we started this past year, there are over 36,000 users loyally using that app on an annual basis.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** How many carrots do you have?

**MR. D. BENNETT:** I've got approximately 8,000 carrots. Right now, Mr. Speaker, I'm only up to a little less than 4,000 steps today, which my goal should be at least 10,000. So I got a few more steps to take in today.

Mr. Speaker, we are investing \$130,000 to the Eat Great and Participate initiative which is designed to increase access to healthy foods and beverage choices in recreation, sport and community facilities. As I referenced earlier, my role with the Town of Lewisporte as recreation director, just before I left and got involved with provincial politics, we implemented a healthy eating policy.

Basically, Mr. Speaker, every time the Town of Lewisporte hosted special events within the community, it's far too often common to serve hot dogs, hamburgers, soft drinks and things like that. With our new healthy eating policy in Lewisporte that we adopted, and which has also been adopted in many other communities throughout the province, every time we have a special event in Lewisporte, they offer healthy choices, whether it be fruit trays, milk, granola bars. I think there's been a great uptake to it. I must commend the Town of Lewisporte for continuing with that there.

Mr. Speaker, we're also investing \$250,000 in smoking cessation. This will build on the existing support for the Newfoundland and Labrador Lung cancer Smokers' Helpline, the Alliance for the Control of Tobacco and the Provincial Smoking Cessation Program for Individuals with Low Income.

Our government will also be providing \$730,000 for the Labrador Travel Subsidy program to offset the cost for teams to travel to provincial competitions, and an additional \$500,000 to support the Labrador Winter Games, which will

be taking place in Happy Valley-Goose Bay in March of 2019.

As I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to enhancing the lives of people of our province. Improving the health and well-being of the people of our province is a large component of this commitment. As outlined in *The Way Forward*, our success in Newfoundland and Labrador by 2025 will be measured by additional targets such as: Breastfeeding initiation rates will increase by 7 per cent and an increased rate in the consumption of fruits and veggies by 5 per cent.

We will increase awareness, introduce policies, practices and programs and create environments which support healthy, active living starting at our schools and our communities. Our healthy living action plan is currently being developed and will address the actions and targets in *The Way Forward* document. The plan supports a health-in-all-policies approach and will require working together with our schools, communities, community groups, health, recreation, sport and various other partners.

We are investing \$852,000 in funding to support physical activity and recreation programs, including physical activity and recreation initiatives such as Participation Nation, Healthy Students Healthy Schools and Find Your Fit! campaigns. Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, we will continue to support healthy living initiatives through a number of investments which we know will have a positive impact on the people we serve.

Budget 2018-2019 invests \$1.79 million to support Community Healthy Living Funds, including recreation facilities and infrastructure. Mr. Speaker, I've been heavily involved in helping a number communities and recreation groups in my district to help them develop applications for the Community Healthy Living Fund.

Far too often, a lot of our communities, especially in the smaller rural areas, rely totally on volunteers and lots of times they don't have the expertise or resources, or even sometimes knowing which programs are available out there. So over the past couple of years, I've met with the Towns of Brown's Arm, Cottlesville and



Embree and sat down with them and come up with some ideas on what type of recreation, healthy programs they can put forward. I must say, since that, it has been quite successful.

The Town of Brown's Arm, I must commend the firette group that has been doing a fantastic job. For a small group, a small community, they do have a lot of young people living in that community. Since they got involved and were able to get some funding through the Community Healthy Living program, it really changed the outlook and the view of the community. They're organizing more community events, people are coming out and it's a real sense of community within that town. I must commend them on the great work they've been doing.

They've had skating programs and bowling programs. Even through these facilities are not in their own community, they travel to nearby communities. They travel to Gander for swimming. So it's been a very positive outcome and people in that community have become more aware of physical activity and also healthy eating.

Just recently, I also met with the local service district of Bridgeport, just a small community of probably a couple hundred people. They are very interested in putting in some programs for their seniors and their residents. I've been helping them and the community of Comfort Cove-Newstead have also come forward. They have a lot of great volunteers in that community, Mr. Speaker. We're just working together to put some initiatives in their community.

Mr. Speaker, competition has also shown to increase physical activity rates across certain youth populations. This year, we have committed \$571,000 to support sport development initiatives and travel. Additionally, we have seen that they are more than capable of competing nationally and internationally. So we are committing \$901,000 to support the Canada Games team and other high-performance athletes.

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity, in my role as parliamentary secretary, this past summer to attend the Canada Games in Winnipeg. I have to say, it was my first experience to a Canada

Games and the work of the mission staff and all of the volunteers who went there, they worked long hours and they worked very hard. But to see the joy and the excitement on all the youth, the athletes and that were there, it's a great investment that we're making in our youth, Mr. Speaker. For many of those athletes, it may be the highest level of competition that they will ever get to compete in. I'm quite pleased that I had the opportunity to take part in that experience.

Mr. Speaker, I guess I'd be remiss if I didn't acknowledge some of the accomplishments of some of other athletes, such as Liam Hickey, on winning the silver medal at the Paralympics in para ice hockey. I had the opportunity to meet Liam when we held a celebration here at Confederation Building. He is such a great advocate for sport and also a true ambassador for our youth. His accomplishment was recognized just a couple of weekends ago at SportNL where he won Male Athlete of the Year.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to make mention of Kaetlyn Osmond. Although she's been mentioned a good many times here in the House of Assembly by my colleague, I have to echo a lot of the things that he has said. I did have the opportunity to see her skate in Marystown and I have to say it was quite the treat. To watch her on TV versus actually seeing her live and up close and personal skating on the ice, it's truly amazing. You can see why she is such an accomplished athlete. She is just so graceful and effortless in all of her jumps and all of her moves.

During that time that I was watching it, I did do a Facebook live post so that people in my district that could not be there had the opportunity to also view it. It was very well received and I think I probably got close to 10,000 hits from that. I just wanted to do a big shout-out to Kaetlyn.

Mr. Speaker, my time is drawing near, but I also wanted to recognize that we are also committing \$1.3 million this year to healthy eating and support such groups as the Kids Eat Smart program, Food First NL and the School Lunch Program. Mr. Speaker, I'm wearing a lapel pin today which is the 25th anniversary of the Kids

Eat Smart program. I just wanted to give them a big shout-out for the great work they do. Every day, 28,000 people in our schools receive a healthy meal because of this program. The work that they do – over 6,000 volunteers help on a daily basis. Our commitment of a little over a million dollars to help towards that program helps to ensure that children are getting a healthy start to their day.

Mr. Speaker, that pretty well concludes my time. I look forward to getting up and speaking again and talk about some more of the great initiatives happening with my District of Lewisporte - Twillingate. It is a great honour to serve the people of that area and I continue look forward to working with them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

I'm very happy to stand and to speak once again to budget '18-'19. I believe the last time I stood I spoke about jobs and how do we measure the success of a budget. Mr. Speaker, I'm often accused of being pessimistic or talking about the sky is falling. When quite contrary, I'm very, very optimistic and I'm very optimistic for the people of the province. I'm very optimistic for our province as we go forward.

But today, I do want to speak about some of the people in our province who have been very hurt by the last two budgets, including this budget. This budget has done nothing to mitigate some of the difficulties that were imposed on some of our people in the province in the last two budgets.

I visited The Gathering Place on Friday. The Gathering Place, as many of us know, is mostly volunteer. There are over 2,000 guests who are now going to The Gathering Place. The Gathering Place provides breakfast and lunch to people who are in deep, deep financial need; people who are unable to afford to buy food on their own; people who are living in horrendous

boarding situations, boarding houses; people who are on the very edge of our society; people who are falling through the cracks, and there are many.

So just in The Gathering Place alone – you can become a member; it's a way to extend dignity to those who use the services of The Gathering Place. The membership costs you \$2 and that covers you for a lifetime. The Gathering Place not only provides food, it provides a place to shower. It provides free clothing; there's a clothing bank that they have there. They also provide computer services if you need to use a computer, if you're able to. And they provide a medical clinic twice a week.

We have doctors and nurses – a lot of nurses are volunteers there. Again, these are for people who have so fallen through the cracks that they can't even make an appointment to see a doctor in a private practice. They have a very small budget. They raise money through philanthropy. They do receive money from the provincial government to help them in the work they do, but it is certainly not enough.

What has happened is that some of these folks have had really difficult situations in their lives. Some of these folks live with very persistent mental health and addictions issues. Some of them continue to use, whether they're using alcohol, whether they're using illicit drugs, whether they're using prescription drugs in an abusive way; people with severe addictions, people who have been incarcerated, so have a criminal record which makes it very difficult to work.

What we've seen, Mr. Speaker, is a widening gap in our province. We have seen – even people who have jobs and people who are working in minimum wage jobs in precarious employment or could only get part-time employment, we've seen those who have so much, their incomes have grown. Their personal income tax rate was decreased with the Conservative government of Danny Williams.

What we have seen in our society is that we did not see the salaries of the average working person increase while we see the cost of living increase. Then, particularly, people who go to The Gathering Place who need the services of

The Gathering Place – the other thing that The Gathering Place provides is a sense of community. We know how difficult it is for people when people feel isolated and disconnected. Many of these people do not have family members who can provide wraparound services to them.

I was at The Gathering Place for about two hours on Friday, Mr. Speaker, and I spoke with some of the people who work there. They have a very small paid staff considering the amount of work they do and the number of people they serve. They're talking about the growing number of people who come to them for services.

There's nowhere else for these people to go. Particularly, because some of the people are using, some of the people have a really hard time socializing and people who are living in boarding houses. Mr. Speaker, some of those boarding houses are in my district and their accommodations are paid for through the Department of AESL. That's public money that is going to provide them with shelter. The shelter is abhorrent. No matter how much I try to describe what some of these boarding houses are like, Mr. Speaker, there is no way for people to really, really conceptualize what they are like unless you go there yourself.

We also have a number of people who go to The Gathering Place who are completely homeless. They may be sleeping in bus shelters. They may be sleeping under balconies in the back alleys of downtown. They may be sleeping in parking garages, and it's hard for us to imagine. It really is hard for us to imagine that this is happening in St. John's, but it is. It's only when we truly face the problems we have that we're able to come up with creative solutions to address the problems. Because if we ignore the problems they only get worse, they don't get any better.

I was fortunate enough to go on the Point-in-Time Count that was organized by the Housing and Homelessness Network and St. John's Housing and Homelessness. What meant is there are a number of volunteers, there were over 100 of us, and we went out into the streets of St. John's from 9 at night until 2 in the morning seeing if we could find people who were homeless or who were precariously housed. We spoke to them. We asked them questions. That

would give us a bit of an idea about the rate of homelessness in a particular area in St. John's.

It was mostly in the downtown area, in the area of St. John's Centre, and it's surprising. Again, I don't think people believe because in Toronto, if you walk downtown in Toronto, you see people who are sleeping over the grates where heat comes up in the wintertime. They're sleeping on the streets. They're wrapped in cardboard, they're wrapped in sleeping bags. We don't think that happens here, but it does.

Unfortunately, it does. At times it's so easy to close our eyes to that.

Some of the ways that some of these folks have really been hurt by the last few budgets is the cancelation of the Adult Dental Program. We have folks with severe – you can imagine, if you don't have money, if you've been using drugs for years in your life, if you've been incarcerated, you may not have taken good care of your dental health. You may not have had the money to take care of your dental health, and then it catches up to you.

We have people who end up at emergency. They don't have dentists. They probably don't have doctors, and we all know how difficult dental pain is. So they end up in emergency, and then they end up on really strong pain killers because they're not getting dental intervention. Maybe they're told you can appeal the fact that you don't have dental coverage.

Well, for some of these folks, unless they have someone to do that process for them, that isn't going to happen. So we have folks maybe who have been drug users, who may have been in recovery or who may be on methadone, who then need to use really strong pain killers in order to deal with their dental problems.

There are some folks we know who have died. They have died because of their dental issues. Mr. Speaker, that's pretty hard for us to imagine, that here at this time in our history, in our Province of Newfoundland and Labrador where we are a caring province, where we are a culture of taking care of one another, that there are all these people who so desperately fall through the cracks.

One of the things The Gathering Place is attempting to do at this point is set up a dental clinic in their facility. It means they're raising the money to do that. To set up a dental clinic is a very expensive undertaking, but they are so committed because they know how crucial this is, how crucial dental health is to so many people in the province who can't afford it and can't afford to go to a dentist.

They also want to expand their medical services. There was money put aside through Eastern Health for a downtown health collaborative but that money, for the past few years, they get two days a week. They said they could use a medical clinic six days a week in their facility. They say the last medical clinic day they had, there were over 200 people who came to see the doctor in one day.

Again, these are people who don't have a doctor. These are people who don't have bus passes. These are people who don't have money. These are people who don't have phones, who can't even make an appointment. These are people, some of them, with very persistent mental health issues or who are still using, and their doctors – they can't get to a doctor; yet, they have some pretty persistent medical issues.

The Gathering Place – and I want to keep saying their name, Mr. Speaker. I want to keep saying their name because the work they do is life-saving work. It's life-saving work for people who are so marginalized that they can't even access the social safety nets that we do have.

So some of these folks again, prior to the cancellation of the Adult Dental Program, prior to that, they may have been able to access dental care and now they can't. And prior to the last few budgets, they may have been able to access over-the-counter drugs for certain conditions that they have and now they cannot.

We know that the amount of money that's available to someone who is on income support is not enough to rent an apartment, is not enough to feed yourself, is not enough to have a phone, is not enough to have a bus pass. It's simply is not. Therefore, they become even more vulnerable and disempowered. So we have to look at that. No matter what our economic

situation is, we know that poverty is more expensive than taking care of poverty.

Then, I'd like to talk about our seniors. We have the highest percentage of senior women in receipt of OAS and GIS. That means – and I've stood up and I've talked about this numerable times here in the House. For the most part, they will receive somewhere between \$12,000 and \$13,000 a year. If that's the case – and many seniors, I've visited them in their own home and their cheque may be \$1,100, a combined cheque, and they often pull out the envelope that their cheques came in and they often write on the backs of those cheques. They write: rent, \$750; heat and light, \$200 – that brings us up to \$950 – phone and cable, another \$100. That's \$1,050. That leaves them with \$150 to \$200 a month to buy food, transportation, their over-the-counter drugs and their dental care.

We all know – we all go to the dentist because we can afford it and we all have great dental programs with our health insurance here as Members of the House of Assembly. We know that you can't get out of the dentist's office under \$100 just for a cleaning and maybe an X-ray. A cleaning and X-ray is probably closer to \$150. That would take the full amount of money that they have simply for dental care. That means there's no money for food, there's no money for clothing, there's no money for over-the-counter drugs, there's no money for glasses, there's no money for transportation and there's not even any money to buy your granddaughter a birthday card.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think that that's how we want to live as a province. I can't imagine that anybody in this House is willing to accept that that's how we have to live as a province. It's been a while since I've talked about these issues and, again, I can be accused of being oh, look at her over there, money tree, doom and gloom, but we're talking about people's lives.

We can look in Labrador and we can look in Happy Valley-Goose Bay at the people who live in a certain wooded area right in town who also don't have a place to live, who also don't have money for transportation, who also can't get dental care, who also can't get glasses. It was amazing to be at The Gathering Place – because it's a microcosm and hear the stories of people

who haven't had access to showers and what it meant to have someone see them in a medical context with real respect and care to help them deal with problems they may have with their feet, to help them have a shower and to make sure they have clean clothes to change into.

Mr. Speaker, this is about human dignity. I beg the Minister of Health and Community Services, I beg the Minister of AESL to visit once again at The Gathering Place. We can all go together. This is not an ambush, Mr. Speaker. I think we need to go and to really see what's happening. I know that a number of the ministers have been there. I know that and they do care, but to see how this has escalated. And it's not getting better.

Again, these are people that have fallen between the cracks. Even when we do have social safety nets in place, they can't access them. We have asked, by not doing justice to these people who have fallen so horribly through the cracks – and again, even our seniors. Our seniors who just have subsistence incomes, not even, and the humiliation that they feel because we're hearing from food banks that many of our seniors are going to food banks. After having raised your family, maybe your family is away, I've heard stories of seniors that their children don't even know that they go to the food bank because they don't want to be a burden.

I don't know how this has happened, Mr. Speaker. Like, how did we get to this point? But I do know that there are solution. We know of people who purposely get arrested because at least they have a roof over their head when they're incarcerated and they get three meals a day. And it's much more expensive to incarcerate someone; it's much more expensive to have someone go through emergency and maybe get admitted to hospital because of their persistent either mental health issues or dental issues that have made them sicker. It's much more economical to do the preventative work, to do the work to prevent people from ending up incarcerated, to prevent people from ending up in the Waterford again, to prevent people from ending up in hospital.

Those kinds of solutions aren't solutions, they're band-aids and they're far more expensive than really taking care of poverty. The same way we

know that it's much more economical to house someone than to deal with homelessness.

So, Mr. Speaker, I put that invitation out to the relevant ministers: Let's go together once again to The Gathering Place to see the work that is being done, and let's go on a Thursday morning around 10:30 when there are a lot of guests coming to The Gathering Place, and let's hear their stories, and let's see the services that The Gathering Place is offering. Let's see what we can do as a province, what we can do for some of our most marginalized people. I believe that we can. I know that we have economic challenges ahead of us, but it's more expensive not to face these issues. It's more expensive not to deal with these issues than it is to find solutions. Some of the solutions are simple, some of them will cost a little bit of money, but it's money that's an investment that will save us money down the road.

I would hope again – this is not in laying blame on anyone, but I believe that together there is something we can do about some of these marginalized folks who are in different pockets around the province. We all know that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North, for what looks like his maiden speech.

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

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

Good afternoon. The first time I stood in this House representing the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, I could not help but feel the power and importance of the work that would be conducted within the Chamber. I can still remember the smell of the new construction and paint that was present at the time.

Mr. Speaker, that was 28 years ago. At the time, I was 17 years old. Clyde Wells was premier and the actual sitting was still on the ninth floor. It was 1990, and I was part of a Newfoundland and Labrador/Saskatchewan 4-H exchange. I was

proudly representing our province, showing some Newfoundland and Labrador hospitality and pride touring local sites of historic significance with the visiting members.

Signal Hill, I remember, was one of the sites on the tour. It was a particularly daunting visit. Just imagine, we brought 20 farm kids who came from the tabletop flat part of Saskatchewan, lacking any depth concept at all, to the 300 metre cliffs of Signal Hill. Thankfully, no one experienced a familiar fate as the buffalo on Brunette Island.

Now 28 years later, once again, I've been honoured with the privilege and responsibility to represent the people of Mount Pearl North and the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. While the smell of paint and plaster has long since faded, the feeling of (inaudible) and the importance of it is more present than ever.

When I graduated high school in 1990, provincial optimism was particularly low. It was a dark time economically, to such a degree that 90 per cent of my graduating class immediately left the province but in that darkness the Newfoundland spirit burned on and we persevered.

Mr. Speaker, on November 21 I was sent a clear message, and I humbly accept this message that I was given. I accept the message to stand up for families in my district and make them a priority, to work constructively with all Members of this House to address the issues and concerns I heard during the campaign.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank all of those who made it possible for me to be here today. Foremost, I would like to thank my family. My wife, Michelle, and our children: Samantha, John and Caleb were an integral part for enabling and supporting me in my political endeavours.

I would like to speak to the merit of my family. My wife and I are the parents of three hard-working, bright, loyal children. Originally, my wife and I worked together on my parent's farm back when Lester's Farm Market consisted of an umbrella table and vegetables I carried to and fro in a wheelbarrow.

In 2001, we made the decision to leave the family farm and start our own farm. We located a piece of Crown land, obtained the lease, parked the car on the side of the road and we went to work clearing the land and developing our own family farm.

Our farm now consists of a horticulture and livestock operation, the province's first land-based tilapia aquaculture site, in conjunction with our greenhouse organic vegetable production. Also included in our farm is what we call our farm chalet. We host everything there from kid's parties to weddings.

Our whole family has toiled, sacrificed and committed every day to working hard and honestly. My wife, she shares my passion for our farm, the industry and family tradition, but has far too often sacrificed her own dreams to enable me to pursue mine. For that I will be forever in her debt. In addition –

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

**MR. LESTER:** In addition to my wife and children, I must acknowledge my grandparents, Jim and Juanita Lester. I was very fortunate and had the opportunity to spend time with my grandparents, living and learning family tradition and lifestyle. Since my grandfather's passing, my relationship with my grandmother has deepened. I treasure the memories that she has shared with me of growing up in Elliston, Bonavista Bay.

Given the operation of our family farm has occupied just about every waking moment in my last 20 years, the workload which I have bestowed upon my family has been tremendous. My love and pride for them grows every day as I watch them adjust to their new duties and responsibilities in my absence.

Mr. Speaker, potential opportunity within the industry for which I have dedicated most of my life is only overshadowed by the need to improve our provincial food security. Not only do we need to increase far more farm production, we also need to increase more food produced in people's homes. If every household in the province produced 400 pounds of produce in a garden about the size of two parked cars, the resulting produce would rival that of existing

commercial production. Not only would this gardening increase the food produced in the province, but gardening is a great activity which enables families and communities to be active and involved.

The physical and mental exercise will improve overall health, and in the long term will reduce health costs and increase the well-being of our people. I would like to commend the initiatives of communities, interest groups and friends in the establishment of community gardens and programs such as the Little Green Thumbs classroom initiative.

One of my favorite activities has been to host on our farm, is school tours, which I've been doing for over 20 years. Because of these initiatives, the perception of farming and food production is continuing to evolve amongst our young people. Recently, I was party to a conversation of two children. Both were probably seven or eight years old. They were watching my youngest son milk one of our cows. When their father pointed out that's where milk comes from, the little girl spoke and said: I know, dad. She then proceeded to thank the cow for providing us with milk. She then also thanked my son and I for being farmers.

Mr. Speaker, industries do not develop overnight. With the exception of the supply-managed industry, agriculture production in this province has steadily declined since Confederation. However, over the past 20 years, through combined efforts of all governments, bureaucrats, interest groups and producers, the agriculture industry is poised to reverse that trend. The current government has been given the reins of an industry that has been in development for decades. Food security of the people of the province is government's responsibility, but when it comes to industry expansion it will be the consumers who drive it and producers who put the plows in the ground.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the amazing and tireless group of volunteers and supporters in both my nomination and campaign. I cannot express strongly enough my heartfelt gratitude for the selfless team effort by all. I would also like to acknowledge my campaign team from 2015. Their initial coaching and guidance moulded me into a better candidate for 2017.

Next, I would like to thank the people of Mount Pearl North who have faith in my abilities to represent them and their interests in the House of Assembly. I had the pleasure and privilege of meeting many of the residents at the doors. The opportunity to listen and talk with the people of the district is my most amiable memory of the campaign. I was truly humbled by the level of support I received in the recent by-election, and I certainly recognize with such support comes a tremendous responsibility.

Having just experienced a very successful campaign and speaking with people of all ages and backgrounds throughout my district, I can assure you the people of Mount Pearl North expect their government to plan beyond tomorrow so that our children will have the opportunity to live and grow in our great province.

Mr. Speaker, MHAs, it's our responsibility to plan for the future and it's very clearly the expectation of my constituents that we do so. Our children's future should be taken into account with every expenditure and every investment of our government today. I will lobby policy-makers to be more effective and creative in program design so young families who are this province's future are supported and encouraged to stay and contribute to the economy and future of this place we call home.

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

**MR. LESTER:** I must point out, that the people of Mount Pearl North have been fortunate to have strong representation in the House of Assembly for many years. Through the former MHA, Steve Kent, who contributed more than 20 years to public life, Steve accomplished a great deal for the people of Mount Pearl North in this province and I congratulate him on a remarkable career.

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

**MR. LESTER:** I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of my junior high school principal, Mr. Harvey Hodder. As an MHA and Speaker, Mr. Hodder also worked hard representing the people of Mount Pearl in this hon. House. During my term in this House, I will do my best to honour the precedent of

service and representation set by both Mr. Kent and Mr. Hodder.

Mr. Speaker, the councils of both Mount Pearl and St. John's have been progressive and forthright. Both cities, through elected officials and competent staff, have ensured the sustainable development and maintenance of infrastructure throughout the District of Mount Pearl North.

I look forward to working with both Mayor Aker and Mayor Breen and the respective councils and staff. I also look forward to working with the many community organizations that are there keeping community support and spirit alive. Be it a group helping a neighbourhood family in need or orchestrating and executing events, such as the Frosty Festival or the St. John's Regatta, I commend them for their efforts and look forward to being part of both.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that I have deep roots in Mount Pearl, starting by the immigration of my ancestor John Lester in the mid-1800s. He was a 14-year-old young man who left his family and accompanied Captain James Pearl in his efforts to establish the farm in Captain Pearl's retirement.

Captain Pearl had a passion for horses, and my ancestor was given the noble responsibility of looking after those horses. That passion for horses has been passed down through my own family's history. While most men who turn 40 are looking for several hundred horsepower, I was satisfied with just two.

The landmark known as Mount Pearl was the central point of advantage of a horse track constructed by my ancestor for Captain Pearl. Local dignitaries, the governor and residents would all make an excursion to the country every Sunday afternoon to watch them participate in the horse races. Today that hill, or Mount Pearl, is part of the Atlantic Cool Climate Crop Research station, but I will always remember it as the best tobogganing hill I ever rode.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to represent the people of my district. I'm also proud to represent my ancestors who stood here before me. Through my upbringing on the family farm, I was taught

at an early age work is not necessarily something you want to do, it's actually about what needs to be done.

Most importantly, what was instilled through my upbringing was a respect for the land. I was taught as a farmer the land we farm for our livelihood now was simply on loan from future generations. Hard work, consistent effort and determination is how I have lived my entire life, just as my ancestors had lived before me. I will apply these principles to my service as MHA for the people of Mount Pearl North and the people of the province.

Since the 1990s, our province and its people have progressively changed the national perception of our place in Canada. Far too long have we been labelled the poor cousin in Canada, while at the same time our hydro power, offshore fishery, mineral resources and our human resources have been exported or traded off as a primary benefit to others rather than the Province of Newfoundland and its people.

Since the '90s, we have rapidly changed that poor cousin image. This change has been a result of consistent effort and a steadfast determination by all political parties and the people of this province. Yes, there have been plenty of stories in the news of fiascos and mistakes, but we all know that's generally what makes the news. By and large, over the course of my adult life, I have been able to hold my head higher as our province has evolved into a mature partner in the Dominion of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, as of late, our province and its people, like much of the rest of the western world, have fallen on an economic downturn driven by falling commodity prices, a declining workforce demographic and uncertain political direction evident in our biggest trade partner to the south. This latest test of our mental resolve is only another storm we must ride through together.

I look to all Members of this House to stay strong, lean in and hold our ground. Let us resound together and let the world know that Newfoundland and Labrador, nor its people, are for sale. We will be the primary beneficiaries of our resources, be it the water flowing in our



rivers, resources in or below our ocean, resources on or below our land and, most importantly, the pride of the people.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be part of the Official Opposition. We are a dedicated team who are here to serve the people and will work hard to meet the expectations and needs of our constituents. That is what I promise to my constituents of Mount Pearl North.

Once again, I'd like to extend my gratitude to the people of Mount Pearl North for giving me this tremendous honour to serve as their Member of the House of Assembly. During my term in this House, I will represent the interests and reflect the values of all residents of my district to the best of my ability.

In closing, I would like to share a recent experience with you while I was attending the Frosty Festival Princesses and Pirates Breakfast. My wife and I sat next to a young family and the mother pointed out to her pre-school daughter that she was sitting next to a very important person. She introduced me as the newest Member of government and the owner of Lester's Farm. While I think the little girl was more impressed by the latter, I was slightly embarrassed for being introduced as such an important person. After a moment of reflection, I spoke to the little girl and I said I was very pleased to meet her and I shook her tiny little hand. I explained to her that I was no more of an important person than anyone else sitting in that room, but as an MHA, I just have a very, very important job to do.

I now ask on behalf of all the people of my district and the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, that we get back to business and continue to represent their interests.

Thank you all for your respectful attention.

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

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for St. George's - Humber.

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

It's great to rise today to speak in the budget debate. Before I begin, I just want to say

congratulations to the Member for Mount Pearl North for having his first speech in the House. I can remember when I did my first speech in the House and it's really a big event to introduce yourself. You had an opportunity to tell us a bit more about yourself, and you did that and some of the things that drive you as a person. So that's very important, very appropriate, and I just want to congratulate you on doing your first speech in the House.

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

**MR. REID:** As well, other people have talked about Volunteer Week as they started to speak on the budget. Volunteer Week was last week, but it's always a good time to congratulate volunteers and to recognize the service they do in our communities. My district is no different; we have many committed volunteers.

One group that always comes to mind are the volunteer fire departments in my district. I have a number of them: Pasadena; Steady Brook-Little Rapids, their combined fire department; Massey Drive; Stephenville Crossing; St. George's; Flat Bay; Bay St. George South; and Codroy Valley.

I've always been amazed at how some of these fire departments manage to put together a group of people with very little resources, sometimes very little support in terms of some areas like the Codroy Valley and Flat Bay where they don't have accompanying municipalities and things like that.

So the work they do and the service they provide with very little financial assistance is very important to the community. But there are other groups such as Lions Clubs, Rotary Clubs, the Bay St. George Status of Women – many other groups within the district that come to mind. I just want to join with the other Members who've congratulated volunteers in their district and congratulate the many volunteers in my district and recognize the contribution they make to social and economic life in the district I represent.

What we're doing here today is we're debating a motion on the budget. Basically the motion is we in this House support the budgetary measures of the province that were introduced by the Finance

Minister a while ago in this House. What we're looking at today is whether or not we support that piece of legislation.

This is what we call a finance bill. It's a wide-ranging debate. It allows us to talk about anything that we'd like to talk about, really, because finance is a very inclusive sort of thing and we have an opportunity to talk about our districts, talk about some specific things that government is doing and to talk generally about where the province is and where we're going.

Also during this debate, if some people at home have been following it, it's an opportunity – usually there's a traditional non-confidence motion, which the Opposition comes forward with. Basically that's an amendment to the budget motion. The amendment is that rather than approve, they amend the motion so that it reflects that it's the will of the House to not approve the budgetary measures of the province.

And of course, this is a non-confidence motion. If more Members vote against the budgetary measures of the province than vote for it, then the government falls. What happens is we go immediately to an election. So the budget debate and the votes on the budget debate are very crucial in terms of demonstrating where we're going as a province, and it allows an opportunity for us to show our support for government as well.

Another part of the budget process are the Estimates committees. And the Estimates committees is sort of like something happening in the background. Although we do it right here in this House for the most part – in some cases, they're done in other places. But the Estimates take place here in this House, and what we do is we go through line by line the Estimates of how much we, as a government, will spend this coming year on various programs and services that government provides.

So it's an opportunity – usually the Opposition asks most of the questions, but government Members sometimes ask questions as well, about why the funds have increased this year, why the funds allocated last year weren't fully spent, why in some cases they were overspent, and things like that. The budget process is usually something that happens in the

background; it doesn't get much media attention. It's an important sort of process that we go through as Members to ensure that we're monitoring the finances of this province.

The Estimates Committees then come back to this House; we have a vote on whether or not we approve the reports –

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

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

**MR. REID:** – of the Estimates Committees.

There are other provisions as well in terms of looking after the finances. For instance, there's the Auditor General's report. The Auditor General looks at the finances of the province and how we've spent money, takes a focused look at specific programs each year. We have the Auditor General's report which comes out, which sort of points out some things that could be improved and points out some problems that would need to be addressed usually.

Sometimes it confirms that okay, everything is going the way it should, but usually what gets the focus of the media are the things that need to be improved. So the Auditor General's report is another sort of measure that's in place for looking after the finances of the province.

Of course, there's also the Public Accounts Committee. The Public Accounts Committee is a committee of this House. Very often, the Public Accounts Committee doesn't get a lot of attention in the media as well. Sometimes it does. In the past, it has. But usually it just operates and it has the ability to call people in, in the department, to look at how government spends its money and how things are happening.

These are some of the provisions that this House has and we follow throughout the years in terms of managing the finances of the province and keeping a handle on how we spend our money.

I want to just take a few minutes to sort of talk a little bit about the budget in general. Maybe later on, if I have time, I'll have time to talk about things in the district, things that are specific to the district, but I just want to have a few general comments about some of the challenges that we

face and some of the things that we've been doing as a government that are good for this province and some of the things that will have a good impact on the province.

First of all, I want to look at the state of the province when we came into power in 2015. Mr. Speaker, where were we then? Where were we then in 2015? What was it that this government faced when we came to power? Well, we were looking at \$2.7 billion in a deficit. Now, sometimes people confuse deficits and debt, but deficit, basically, is the amount of money you spend each year over what you bring in as revenue. So \$2.7 billion – it sort of boggles the mind how much more we were spending than we were bringing in, in revenue. That's something that we faced.

Really, it was over \$5,000 per man, woman and child in the province that we were overspending in terms of the amount we brought in. It's a challenging situation that we faced. We really didn't have any realistic plan to return to a balanced budget where we would spend only the amount that we brought in. We didn't have a realistic plan to return to a state of surplus or even a balanced budget. Really, our finances were based on the hope that we would continue to have oil at \$100 a barrel. When that fell through, we were in a very difficult situation when the price of oil fell.

The plan the previous government seemed to have was: Okay, we're going to be fine because oil is always going to be at \$100 a barrel. We don't have to worry about the overspending, we'll just dip into that oil revenue.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Hope for the best.

**MR. REID:** Hope for the best, as someone said.

That's the situation we found ourselves in. We also had something else. If you look at the way oil revenue has impacted other countries or other jurisdictions around the world, one of the things you find is that sometimes places that discover huge amounts of oil have a big influx of revenue. They end up, in the long run, worse off than places that didn't discover oil. Some academics call it the paradox of plenty.

The paradox is we discovered a lot of oil but the impact it has on the economy of the region, in the long run, is negative. Places that discovered oil could end up worse off than places that never had any oil. I think this idea of the paradox of plenty is something that should have been really a – something that we recognized where we were going.

One of the things I brought in as a private Member's resolution was the resolution on the legacy fund. It's similar to what Norway has done. Some countries have managed their oil revenue well, and some haven't done so well in managing their oil revenue.

I think we have a good future in oil and gas in this province. We luckily will get a second chance to manage it right. I think we have to sort of learn the lessons from other jurisdictions but also learn the lessons from ourselves, what happened to us as we got this huge influx of oil revenue. The idea of the legacy fund is something that I've been promoting, that I've been bringing forward since I've been in this House.

If you look at other countries that discovered oil and had an influx of revenue, one of the things they do is they often begin to embark on megaprojects. The pattern here in this province fits that sort of pattern very well in terms of what happened in other jurisdictions, what we didn't learn from. But we went into Muskrat Falls, and we all know where that went. We all know the story. We all know the problems it's creating for us, and it's a problem we have to deal with, Mr. Speaker.

That was the situation we found ourselves in. Our approach since we came into power is trying to manage the fiscal situation we're in, trying to continue to deliver services and programs that are very important to the population of the province. We've tried to grow the economy and create more jobs. Those are things we've tried to do.

I just want to look at some of the things in the budget and how they relate to the way we've been dealing with these problems. One of the things we've been trying to do is work with the federal government to leverage more funds in terms of waste water systems and community

infrastructure. We've been very successful in working with the federal government to leverage the money we spend so that we get more for the communities in this province.

We've also been spending smarter. One of the things the Member for Windsor Lake did when she was Finance Minister was look at zero-based budgeting. I think that was sort of, I guess, something that changed the way we do the finances in this province. Really, the question I ask is, why did it take so long? Why did it take so long for us to start doing zero-based budgeting?

Well, zero-based budgeting is rather than looking at what the government department or program got last year, what it is we start from zero and we say: okay, do you need this expenditure? Everything has to be justified. Everything from the bottom up has to be justified.

It's taking a look at everything, rather than saying, okay, here's what you got last year and using that as a base. They start at zero and look at where – everything has to be sort of justified over again, which is an important thing because sometimes you get momentum within the bureaucracy. You get programs that get established and the people are there and they just carry on, sometimes carry on after the circumstances they were designed to address don't exist anymore. So I think that's an important change.

Another thing this government has done, and it's outlined in the budget document, is terms of leasing space. We've reduced the amount of space we lease as a government. We use the space that government has in a better way, in a more efficient way to save us money, save government money.

Another thing the government has done is develop the idea of a vehicle fleet. Government has a lot of vehicles. Each department has their own vehicles. By pooling these together, we can reduce the number of vehicles we need by about 10 per cent. Some departments need vehicles in the summer, some need them in the winter and things like that. By doing this, we are able to spend smarter and save about 10 per cent in terms of vehicles that we have in this province.

Another few things is we've been able to consolidate collections and reduce redundancies in having two offices. By combining the collections, we've created an asset management framework which allows us to dispose of things we don't need in more timely manners. So that's something that's been very positive.

In terms of social policy, I just want to comment on a few positive things that I see there. I am very interested that in this budget we've talked about mental health and addiction services. What's happened is this government has moved forward and a part of this – I want to give credit where it's due – is the All-Party committee that we have in this House and the ideas that were brought forward.

We're transforming the way that we deliver these services. We're decentralizing. We're investing in infrastructure in terms of the replacement of the Waterford Hospital but we're also making services available in other places around the province. We're expanding online or e-services in terms of mental health.

Those are some things that we're doing. I could talk about the seniors' income benefit, support for first-time homebuyers. I could talk about the Premier's Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes. I could talk about our commitment to libraries in this province – something that is very important to me. I could talk about our investment in post-secondary education and the importance of that in terms of not just as social spending but an investment in our future. I could talk about those things.

My time is running out, Mr. Speaker, so I'm going to take my seat and, hopefully, I'll get another chance to have a few comments during the budget debate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

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

Indeed it's an absolute pleasure to get up here today and, like I always say, Mr. Speaker, as you know, to represent the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis and the beautiful people in the District of Cape St. Francis.

Before I start on the budget speech today, this weekend was an important weekend for our party. I have to say, Mr. Speaker, we had a great weekend and it was nice. I want to congratulate the new leader of our party, Mr. Ches Crosbie, for this weekend.

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

**MR. K. PARSONS:** I also want to congratulate Tony Wakeham for putting his name forward. Two of them, I have to really say, Mr. Speaker, sometimes in politics things can get nasty and stuff like this, but both ran great campaigns and represented our party. The two individuals showed a lot of class while they were doing it. It was great to be able to see what they did and get out to the people of the province our new leader. I know our caucus looks forward to working with him and we look forward to seeing Tony in the future also because I'm sure he will not be out of the political picture too long.

But the weekend was a good weekend for me. I've been around the party for a long while, Mr. Speaker. I'm not saying my age or anything but I can remember going when my father was involved and I was youth candidate, around for Tommy Hickey and lot of fellows down my way.

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

**MR. K. PARSONS:** I'm not telling you how old I am.

Sometimes in politics you get to meet a lot of good people over the years, and it was so nice to see some people there. There was one lady there from Gander this weekend, with the party almost 60 years. It's amazing how long that people are around and stuff like that. So for our party, it was a real good weekend. I believe on Saturday we had around 400 or 500 people out to support. It's good for politics in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Sometimes, Mr. Speaker, when you look at politicians and politics, in general, the wrong name comes out. I know the party across the way, they have their convention coming up in June and I'm sure there'll be a great crowd turn out for them also. Basically, people were telling me all weekend thank you for the job you're doing. No matter if you're on government side or Opposition, sometimes it's really nice to be able to hear that people think that you're doing a good job. No matter if you're from Grand Bank or if you're from Cape St. Francis, when you go to your district and you talk to different people, it's good to be able to hear the perspective from other parts of the province. I know when I'm in my own district I hear a lot from people but they're usually my friends and people I've known. But this weekend I had an opportunity to speak to some people I haven't met in a long period of time. It's great to be able to see that.

We have a province and we have a funny province sometimes because you'll see there are diehard Tories, there are diehard Liberals and diehard NDPers – and you can really pick them out in a crowd because, no matter what, they are what they are. It's nice to see the way the people do enjoy their politics. Like I said, we had a great weekend the weekend going down.

I also want to recognize organizing committees and stuff like this because, in a lot of cases, most of this is done from volunteers. Mr. Speaker, putting off what they did the weekend was great. I had the opportunity on Saturday to say a few words on our leader and it was absolutely a privilege to be able to speak about our Member here for Topsail - Paradise and the great job that he's done for our party in the past, as our leader and everything else –

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

**MR. K. PARSONS:** – and as a former premier.

Like I said, that man has done so much for not only his own district, not only this party, but he's done a lot for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, and I thank him for the great job he's done.

Mr. Speaker, I'm going to move on now a little bit but we had the maiden speech day today from my good friend from Mount Pearl North.

During his speech today, I heard a lot about farming. Since he's sat here next to me in the House of Assembly, I'm after learning a lot about farming and the importance of food security and everything else, but I have to let him know that I did a bit of farming myself.

Being the youngest son of four older brothers, if we had a choice – my father at the time was fishing and he was also farming and everybody wanted to go in the boat and go fishing. So there was only a scattered fellow that could go in a do a bit of weeding or thinning out a few turnips. I always ended up with the short end of the stick doing that. I remember one year we set 19 sacks of seed. I don't know, we fed half of Flatrock that year with the potatoes that we got out of it. It was interesting what he said about a garden, just two car parking lots for 400 pounds, that's what you said there.

When I first moved into my own home, my next door neighbour had a little garden and he used to grow some vegetables. So I got into it. One year I grew potatoes, turnip, carrot. I had some cabbage and I grew onions. I always said – I gave it up after a while because I just didn't have time to do it and whatnot – for anybody who does it, you really feel good about eating Sunday dinner when you know it's your own potato, carrot and turnip that's on the plate. It just gives you a little bit different – that's what we see in Newfoundland and Labrador. No matter if it's the fish you caught the first morning or it's the vegetables that you grow and we eat, we do feel that sense of that's something that I did. It's a great feeling.

I know that the MHA there, he's probably feeding half of St. John's and Mount Pearl, but there is nothing better than our own vegetables. I know when the time of year comes when potatoes first come out of the ground and turnip and cabbage, when you cook a good feed, there's nothing better than the fresh vegetables. I think it's important what he said today. I just want to applaud him because he brings a different perspective to our caucus.

I went and had the opportunity, as a lot of people in this House of Assembly, to knock on doors in Mount Pearl North and we heard different things, but there was one thing I always heard about the hon. Member, and while he talked

today about the little one with the farm, everyone related to him is a hard worker.

I can assure the people of Mount Pearl North that, so far, what I've seen of him here in the House of Assembly and in our caucus, he's still a very, very hard worker and a good Member of this caucus. I really want to thank him for what he brings here to the caucus.

Mr. Speaker, we're talking about the budget today, and it's pretty interesting comments that I've heard from across the way. I don't expect government Members to get up and say anything negative about the budget or whatever, but when the budget came down in 2016 there was a big turmoil in this province. There was a big turmoil over across the way there, too. There were a lot of Members across the way that felt really hard about the budget that was brought in. They felt it when they went back to their districts and they felt it throughout the province.

I can remember out in front of Confederation Building here with protest after protest. There were protests with the libraries, there were protests with the levy, there were protests with the insurance tax, there were protests about all these fines and everything else that came in place. Gas tax was a protest, and people were really, really upset. Now, we've moved into it two years later – but I want to remind the hon. Members over across the way that these 300 fees that were increased and the 50 new ones that were brought in are still there.

I spoke to people in my district and they said, Kevin, there wasn't much in the budget. There was nothing in the budget, nothing like that. I said no, there was nothing in the budget, but there were no improvements to what you were all so upset about in 2016.

The hon. Member across the way mentioned a few different things in his speech today. He mentioned about overspending and the problem of the previous administration to overspend. If I'm correct, I believe the increase in spending since 2016 has increased every year since. There's no reduction whatsoever in spending. He talked about going to a balanced budget, but I think most of the indicators that are out there right now show that we're going in the wrong direction.

Mr. Speaker, I always want to talk about young people in my district and I always worry about where we're going in the future. The name of the document, this year's budget is *Building for Our Future*. My concern is if we're building for our future, I think we should be investing in our future and investing in our young people.

I know there are young families down my way and it's a major concern. They're moving away. They're moving to Alberta and Ontario. I had a family this week that moved to Nova Scotia. I know most people in the district are concerned about what's happening with our economy.

What happens this time of year is you'll see there's a lot of seasonal employment. I had a call this morning from a young gentleman in my district. He said: Kevin, do you know anywhere where I'm going to be able to get stamps this year, anywhere where I can get a job? He said I'll do anything.

He's a heavy equipment operator. He's worked all his life so far – I think he's about probably, maybe 41, 42 years old. He said, you know what, the problem is this summer coming it's not looking too good for the couple of jobs he has down the road. He says construction doesn't seem like there's much on the go. I said, I think there's a lot of people in the same boat that you're in. Well, he said, I can't stay around this summer and just hope for it, either that or I'm going to have to move away. That's what's happening in our society today.

Mr. Speaker, housing starts are way down. It's in this book, and it shows that's what's going to happen. I spoke a little bit earlier today about the Stephenville Airport and the trickling effect. I look at what happens when you talk about housing starts.

I spoke to a couple of people that works at one of the larger supply areas – in the area, actually, on Torbay Road. The guy told me this weekend, he said: Kevin, b'y, there's not a lot on the go. There's nothing on the go whatsoever. He said this time of year you would see fellows with subdivisions and everything else starting up and they're really concerned because they may have to have layoffs in a building supply store.

This is the time of year when you'll see people gearing up. I have a lot of people in my community of Flatrock. There are three different companies that do roofing and this time of year they're gearing up, hoping it's going to be – I spoke to one of them and: Kevin, I got nothing lined up at all. That guy probably employs 15 people through the summer, and they get their unemployment. It's seasonal work. A lot of Newfoundland, and I'm sure out around in most districts it's the same as the Town of Flatrock. They're relying on people to be able to get a bit of work to be able to do this stuff.

When you talk of how our economy is working – over on the other side: We're doing a great job. We're doing some good job on the economy. We're building the economy, but all the indicators in your budget are showing the opposite. The actual money that people are going to spend in our province this year is way down. People are moving away. The decline in population, people are going to move away.

I hate to be negative. I try to be positive all the time, but we got some issues in industries in our province that are very serious. Like I said, the construction industry, there are a lot of people that are in construction that are really concerned. Now, we had some fantastic years. I know that in a community like Torbay for example, probably four years, you look at 2010-2014, I'd say Torbay grew by about 20 per cent. The housing starts and the construction that was on the go in that community was unbelievable.

Flat Rock probably grew by about the same, and there were young companies starting up, everybody seemed like – to get an electrician or to get a plumber was unbelievable. It was hard to come by. People, you just couldn't get them. But today I know lots of electricians and I know lots of plumbers that are really concerned about what's going to happen to them. That's where you need a plan in place. That's where you need to have government step up and be able to put a plan in place so people can get some work.

Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. Member before me said about oil prices and how we were relying on oil prices. We all know what the effect of oil prices did to our province. Not only in Newfoundland and Labrador, it was Saskatchewan, Alberta. There are other

provinces that had similar effects on the oil prices as we did.

I think our economy and everything else, we took a slam because there are a lot of people that travel to – I know a lot of people in my area that travel back and forth to Fort McMurray, and the effect of the oil sands and the economy that was happening, whether you were an electrician or a plumber there were great dollars getting made, good money getting made.

When you look today and you see that most of these people are home. Like I said, they're willing to take jobs of any kind at all. I know that megaprojects are slowing down. Muskrat Falls is slowing down, what happened out in Long Harbour is slowing down, and there are a lot of projects that people rely on. But that's the type of economy we had for years and years.

When it comes to oil prices I look every evening – I don't know about the rest of you here; I'm sure most of you do that. I look at the business report on the *NTV News* every evening. I'm like most Newfoundlanders and Labradorians; I want to see that oil price go up. Now, not too bad – I mean, I don't want it to affect my gas cost and stuff like that. But I do realize how important oil is to our economy, and how important it is to having some money to be able to spend. When you look at – I believe, I could be corrected by the Minister of Finance – I think \$1 on a barrel means about \$22 million to our economy over the year. That's a lot of money. That's a lot of money to be able to invest in our schools and invest in education and invest in our people and our young people, ensuring that we do have some money coming into our economy.

So, Mr. Speaker, I know that we all in this House of Assembly are working to make sure that people stay in our area. I know government is not an employer, but we have to give the sense that our economy is doing well and we have to do some investments. Government is doing some investments. We did some great investments here ourselves over the years. I look at the investments in my district with schools, roads and whatnot.

I understand but I just think that government sets the tone and sets where we are. I believe the indicators that are in this budget are not where

we want to be. This is coming on three years now that this government will be in. For the first two years it was all our fault, but it's time to take some responsibility for our economy, making sure that our economy works and making sure that our people and our young people have opportunities. That's where we have to be. We have to have those opportunities for people to be able to work.

Mr. Speaker, I only have a few minutes left, but on my Budget Speech today I want to just mention a few things. I want to congratulate my colleague here on the side of me from CBS and, also, the Minister of Justice on the great move they made last week in putting an RNC detachment in CBS. I know how hard he worked for it. Congratulations, I really want to say that. Congratulations on doing a great job for your constituents.

The new chief of police, Joe Boland, is a good friend of mine. I had the opportunity to play hockey against Joe for years. I played softball against him for years. He's from Logy Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cove. When he was appointed, I never ever had the opportunity here in the House to congratulate him.

He's a fine gentleman. He'll be a great asset as leadership for the RNC. I know he spent a great bit of time with the police association and he came through the ranks. He's come right through the ranks and he's done everything right.

He comes from a great family. Their family are fantastic families. The Boland family, they're all known down my way as a bunch of winners. Joe is a winner himself and he's a great asset, like I said. I really want to congratulate him and wish him really well. I know the people in Logy Bay-Middle Cove-Outer Cove are really proud of him.

Also, from the same community is the new, I guess he's called superintendent of Corrections – I can be corrected, I think that's the title – Don Roche. Donnie also is around my age; he's a little older. I had the opportunity all my life to watch Donnie and I watched him grow.

This is a guy who came right through the ranks also and is a class-A individual. He was here in



the House of Assembly when his appointment was made – notice here in the House of Assembly. He had his wife and his son with him; Matthew was out in Corner Brook and couldn't make it. He also had a very lovely lady with him, and probably one of my best friends for a long, long time, Ms. Mary Roche, his mom. I know how proud she was to be able to come here that day and watch Donnie be recognized for the great job they did. Those are the two individuals in my district who are taking major roles in this province and I really want to congratulate them.

Mr. Speaking, in closing, while this budget, people just said there's not a lot in it, but do you know what? We still have 300 fees. We still have the 50 new ones that are in place. Carbon tax is coming. There is very little this government has done to put any relief to the people of this province. It's time to think about the people in the province.

I didn't get a chance to say this, but insurance tax, taking off one point now and one point there. You brought the whole lot of it in; you should have taken it all off.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Thank you.

Given the hour of the day, I move, seconded by the Member for Burin - Grand Bank, that the House do now adjourn.

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

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

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

This House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 o'clock.

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