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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.

Today in the Speaker's gallery, I would like to welcome Ms. Sheila Miller. Ms. Miller will be mentioned in a Member's statement this afternoon. A very big welcome to you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: Today we will hear statements by the hon. Members for the Districts of Torngat Mountains, Labrador West, Terra Nova, Ferryland, Virginia Waters - Pleasantville.

The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Mr. Speaker, on March 18 of this year, during a weekend snowstorm, four young travellers left Hopedale by snowmobile, heading to Natuashish. They became disoriented in a blizzard, and failed to arrive at their destination. Mr. Speaker, I can attest to the weather conditions as I travelled from Nain to Makkovik that same day.

This led to a joint ground search and rescue effort from Natuashish and Hopedale, which spread over three days. Four people were found, one at a time, and to our relief, all four were rescued and returned to their family and friends.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the ground search and rescue teams from Hopedale and Natuashish for risking their lives, and their efforts in conducting a successful search in adverse weather conditions.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. Members to join me in thanking all ground search and rescues in our province for their continued efforts to locate and assist people in trouble, often in very challenging situations and adverse weather conditions.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LETTO: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to recognize another volunteer extraordinaire. Don O'Leary has been maintaining Jean Lake Walking Trail, a centerpiece of outdoor recreation located in Wabush. For more than 10 years, he has been grooming and maintaining the trail in summer and winter.

This six-kilometre trail system is widely used year-round by the residents of Labrador West as an outdoor recreation facility. With its rivers, beautiful landscape and scenic rest areas, it can be called a gem in the wilderness. Residents have taken great pride by adding their own personal touches along the way.

Don O'Leary and his partner Ches Moyles accepted the responsibility to maintain this trail on a daily basis. As Don would say, "we're not getting any younger," so they have scaled back and hope that a new generation of volunteers will step up and maintain the trail that he loves so much.

I ask all hon. Members to help me congratulate Mr. O'Leary and thank him on his dedication to the trail and making sure that anyone who walks this trail has a memorable and safe experience.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Terra Nova.

MR. HOLLOWAY: Mr. Speaker, I have stood in my place in this hon. House to recognize the abundance of leaders and invaluable community organizations who make the Terra Nova District beautiful, unique and strong.

Well, today is no different. I am pleased to once again rise and acknowledge the countless volunteers in communities like Glovertown, Traytown and Cull's Harbour who give freely of their time and their talent to make these remarkable places to live, to work, to raise families and to retire.

On Saturday night, I had the distinct privilege of attending the annual seniors' appreciation dinner hosted by the Alexander Bay Lions Club where nearly 180 of our seniors came out to share in fellowship, good music and a great meal.

Saturday night was time to give thanks and to acknowledge the contributions made by our seniors. Their legacy adds to and supports this year's National Volunteer Week theme of celebrating the value in volunteering by building connections, competence, confidence and community.

I ask all my hon. colleagues to join me in extending a heartfelt thank you to all the volunteers for all you do; thus enriching each of the 38 communities in the Terra Nova District.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for the District of Ferryland.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today in the hon. House to offer my congratulations to the members of the St. Kevin's Mavericks girls' basketball team. These incredibly talented athletes won the provincial 4A high school girls' basketball championship.

This win comes as no surprise after a near perfect season for the team, with an amazing 31 wins of 32 games played. The girls also claimed victories in the Keith Keating Memorial, the Clarence Sutton Classic and the Elite 8 tournaments this season.

I want to acknowledge team members Emma Power and Grace Bennett, as both players have signed on to play with Memorial University Sea Hawks next season. Congratulations to both, I wish them every success in their university basketball careers.

It is very exciting to see bright, young athletes from the district excelling in their passion and following their dreams. Any sport develops lifelong skills and lessons to be used all through your adult life.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members of the House to join me in congratulating team members: Jayne

Howlett, Meagan Clarke, Kaitlyn Piercey, Alex McGrath, Alyssa Maloney, Jenna Hayden, Taylor Frizzell-Ryan, Emma Power, Kaeleigh Vaughan, Grace Bennett, Kielly Emberley and Kristen Goss, as well as their coach Randy White and assistant coaches Janet Lee and Jeff Kirk, on their exciting win and outstanding performance of this 2017-2018 season.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I rise in this hon. House to recognize a constituent who has gone above and beyond the call of duty. Sheila Miller has recently completed an expedition with the True Patriot Love Foundation, which raises funds and awareness surrounding veterans returning to civilian life. As the mother of a veteran, Sheila knows first-hand how hard the transition can be once someone is released from the military. The expedition Sheila completed was a fundraiser which brings ill and injured veterans together with members from the business community.

The group spent three weeks together, meeting and conquering mental and physical challenges. They hiked from Lukla to Mount Everest Base camp. From there the group continued to Lobuche East summit and back to Pang bouche and Ama Deblam base camp.

Over the course of the expedition, the group travelled approximately 210 kilometres in just 13 days. The expedition was to help veterans transition into civilian life spend time and build relationships with people outside of the military. After the expedition, business people are paired with a veteran to mentor for a year.

Of her experience Sheila says: It was such an honour to serve those who served us.

Please join me in thanking Sheila for her dedication and commitment to our veterans.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: It is brought to my attention that we have a very important municipal leader joining us. The mayor, Mayor Stone of Red Bay and her husband.

Welcome to you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, when people think of Her Majesty's Penitentiary, there is usually an immediate focus on the well-known and obvious issues with the facility. I would like to take the opportunity today to speak about a positive initiative at HMP, the woodworking program.

The inmates who are accepted into the program spend four to six hours per day in the shop, giving them an opportunity to make something from nothing. Working in the shop is calming, therapeutic and relaxing. Inmates who work there have fewer disciplinary issues.

This program has built furniture for the Muskrat Falls Inquiry, for the Dunphy Inquiry, the Family Court in St. John's and here for our House of Assembly committee room. One of the special projects for inmates is their work on the floats for the St. John's Santa Claus Parade as their families get to see the finished products.

Mr. Speaker, I have personally visited the trade shops at our correctional facilities across the province. I have spoken with inmates who participate in these programs about how they benefit from the work and the pride they feel due to the positive impacts they can have on their communities. As well, inmates are developing skills that they can use when they leave custody and are being provided with a sense of purpose as they serve their sentences.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to give a special thank you to Correctional Officer Steve Martin who is

in charge of the shop at HMP. He is extremely talented and committed to this important program.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement today. We join with the minister in recognizing the good work and the good things that are happening at Her Majesty's Penitentiary. This is another example of solid programming that benefits inmates and I believe can also benefit those that are working in the institution as well.

I can tell first-hand that calming, therapeutic and relaxing, as referenced by the minister, is very true when it comes to woodworking. I'm sure it's true in this case as well. I've seen some of the work done by the inmates and what they've produced. It's a quality product that I hope they're all very proud of and they should be proud of.

I'd be remiss, as well, if I didn't mention the good work of the people working there, including correctional officer Steve Martin, and thank him for his dedication and leadership. Again, Mr. Speaker, we join with the minister in recognizing this very positive program that's happening in our correctional system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister. Bravo to correctional officer Steve Martin and all COs and staff who have worked to make this program a reality and a success.

Positive programming like this is an absolute must for the people who are incarcerated in our prison system. We must develop more programs like this that benefit inmates, staff and, ultimately, the people of the province so inmates return to society with improved training and marketable work skills.

Bravo Steve Martin and all our COs who have dedicated their lives to our justice system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister Responsible for WorkplaceNL.

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Speaker, for the third consecutive year in Newfoundland and Labrador, the lost-time incidence rate due to workplace injury or illness has remained at an all-time low of 1.5 per 100 workers, among the lowest in Canada. The rate among 15- to 24-year-old workers also remained stable for the second consecutive year at 1.3 per 100 workers, remaining below the overall provincial rate. It is important that we help instill a culture of safe work practices at a young age, and the statistics indicate our efforts are working.

There were small declines in new claims, including approximately 200 less short-term claims and 160 less health-care only claims in 2017 versus 2016. Unfortunately, there were 25 work-related fatalities in 2017: five accidental and 20 from occupational disease. As I have said numerous times, one fatality is one too many.

In February of this year, the Occupational Health and Safety Division of my department, in conjunction with WorkplaceNL, released a new five-year workplace injury prevention plan. It contains 50 priorities to be implemented for 2018-2022, with a core focus on serious injury and occupational disease prevention.

Mr. Speaker, while the statistics released by WorkplaceNL tell a successful story in our province, there is still a need for continued vigilance. It is our responsibility as leaders,

employers and employees to ensure our workplaces are safe. Our government will continue to work with safety partners across the province in an effort to further reduce serious injuries and workplace incidents.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I want to thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement. Mr. Speaker, it's positive to hear that the long-term incident rate due to workplace injury and illness remains low in this province. I am sure that we all agree this must even go lower and we always can do more.

Mr. Speaker, when loved ones go to the workplace families expect them to come home safely. We know workplace incidents have a profound and lasting effect on individuals and families. It's so hard and sad to hear there were 25 work-related fatalities and 20 more occupational disease deaths last year.

Safety must be first and foremost in any workplace. We must do everything possible to prevent incidents from occurring in the first place. Supporting and creating a strong culture of safety in the workplace is so important and is something we should all strive for.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I too thank the minister for the advance copy of the statement. I'm glad to see the commitment to further reduce the number of accidents and fatalities. Even though the rate of assault and violent acts in the workplace declined somewhat in the past year, that was after a 53 per cent

increase between 2012 and 2016, mostly in health care and social services. The prevention strategy recognizes that more education and enforcement is needed, and I hope this happens for these front line workers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Before we continue, I also have been informed that we have a former colleague in this House of Assembly, former MHA Oliver Langdon.

Welcome to you, Sir.

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, this morning on CBC we heard an extensive interview with a Liberal MHA and former minister who described her experiences with intimidation. We now know, and I quote, “bad behaviour” was allowed to happen.

I ask the Premier: Why have you allowed intimidation and harassment to continue within your government and not taken action before now?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think when you look at the series of events that we’ve had to deal with within the last week or so, there have been a number of decisive actions that we have taken.

Back to the question that the leader of the Opposition has just asked, I’m sure he’d be fully aware, given his experience in Cabinet meetings and in particular when you look at ministers of Finance, the cut and thrust what happens within

those Cabinet meetings, they can actually be very challenging times.

Mr. Speaker, I’ve always had my door open. I’ve always made myself readily available for individuals, no matter what position they hold within this government, to make myself available to listen to any concerns.

Mr. Speaker, we’ve navigated our way through this. There’s a lot more work to be done, and I would encourage every single Member in this House of Assembly to work in collaboration to make this a better place to work in.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

We certainly want to see it become a better place, there’s no doubt about it, but this has been ongoing for some time. The former minister and MHA spoke at length this morning during the interview and talked at some length about the culture of widespread harassment and intimidation that occurs within the Liberal caucus and Cabinet.

Premier, would you agree with her assessment?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, I always encourage people to step up and speak out on issues that concern them. This morning’s interview was an example of that and, Mr. Speaker, we are more than willing to listen.

In past administrations what we’ve seen is that people did not bring this out publicly. They swept these matters, typically, under the rug. That’s what has been happening in the past. It’s time that we deal with things differently and that’s what you’ve seen this week.

So people must be comfortable in stepping up. An example of that, we saw this week, and we’ve taken decisive action by removing ministers for inappropriate behaviour and poor conduct. As the allegations have been laid against those two ministers, we’ve taken them

out of the Cabinet positions, taken them out of caucus, Mr. Speaker, and they've been dealt with very decisively.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Mr. Speaker, I'd say to the Premier that the Premier was in the room for much of this. The Premier was actually present in the room for most of this.

So I ask the Premier again: Does he agree with the assessment as discussed on CBC this morning?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, when you go through deliberations at the Cabinet table and Members speak up about positions that they have to take on a number of issues, I think the Members opposite would be very aware of this.

As I've watched things unfold, I've always made – there's no minister that I worked closer with than the Minister of Finance. Oftentimes, they are some very difficult decisions because they have to make decisions which obviously I would support, but decisions are made that could actually impact on people. Back in 2016 this government had to make a number of very tough decisions that were impactful on people in our society.

Mr. Speaker, when you make those decisions, they come with some contention. They come sometimes with discussions that people take very different views on, but I've always supported the Cabinet Members. I've always supported our Finance ministers every step along the way with decisions, even the tough ones, that had to be made.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I fully understand how challenging it can be sometimes when you have a difference of opinion, but the MHA this morning was very clear, and I thought did a fantastic job, of articulating the climate and culture in which she had to work. It led to her resignation.

Premier, are you saying because things are difficult that it was okay for these things to happen; or, if it's not, why did you not act before now?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, what I'm saying is that when the difficult decisions had to be made, I always supported the Finance ministers within those difficult decisions. I've always made sure that myself was available – I did not experience bullying at that Cabinet table. That was not my experience, Mr. Speaker.

But in any case where people would have felt that they had felt they were intimidated or they felt bullied, my door was always open. I had multiple and, still do, continue to have ongoing discussions with our Finance ministers, Mr. Speaker. When these issues are raised, we look forward to working in collaboration, we look for resolutions and solutions to what are systemic problems that we face in legislatures all across this country.

We are no different and we want to improve, Mr. Speaker. As leader of this party, I am more than willing to take on the serious task that we face at hand and get us in a better place.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

The MHA spoke about her experience and she referenced harassment and intimidation, such as isolation. She referred to gaslighting. So I say to the Premier, you were aware of these incidents that were happening right in your caucus and right in your Cabinet, and you did nothing.

Why didn't you show leadership before now? Why did you not show leadership when this was

happening and deal with the intimidation which was ongoing now for her two years that she was a Cabinet minister?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, I am not aware of the situations that the leader of the Opposition just referred to. These are not situations that I've been involved in, for sure; not situations that were ever brought to my attention.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, it is time for this House of Assembly to work together, work in collaboration. I've invited leaders of both parties. I've already met with one of the leaders, Mr. Speaker, and I've reached out to the leader of the Opposition, as he's fully aware, so that we can sit down together. All of us realize, as has been said by many people in this room, these are systemic by nature, not always isolated to one particular party.

Other parties have experienced this. We are taking this, Mr. Speaker, putting this in a very open and transparent way. That is how you deal with it. That has been my approach to deal with the issues, Mr. Speaker, make decisions on issues that are brought forward.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Mr. Speaker, the Premier has stated day after day over the past week that he was only made aware of concerns last Wednesday. Well, the Member this morning, and a former minister, stated that she left Cabinet because of the very harassment and intimidation that occurred and made the Premier aware of why she was leaving Cabinet.

So I ask the Premier: Do you still stick with your story that you had no idea before last Wednesday that these issues were happening in your own government?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, I think it was on the interview this morning, the decision, when the former minister of Finance and I met, I was not at all willing to receive the resignation of the minister. As a matter of fact, I encouraged the former minister to stay, and I think that was articulated this morning.

I still believe that people with experience both in and outside of government could add a lot of value, and I still feel that way, Mr. Speaker. So when the decision was made by the minister, I said publicly that there was some time that was given to actually re-evaluate. Mr. Speaker, the final decision was made and the final decision was given. I've always supported both publicly. Since that, I've supported the former minister of Finance and I will continue to do so. I think this is a time that we need to work together.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I appreciate everything the Premier is saying, but he's just not answering the question. As the Member said that when she was leaving, it was made aware to the Premier the reasons why. That's what I got out of that interview this morning.

So I ask the Premier: Is that correct? Did she make you aware of why she leaving, and what did you do about it?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's been mentioned many times about the meeting that I had with the former Finance minister. At that time she had made a decision because of personal reasons to leave Cabinet. And I will tell you now, that was not a good day. I was surprised with the decision that was made, and I think the experience that the former minister of Finance brought to the table, brought to the Cabinet, brought to this government was valuable. I have always supported all MHAs in this government and I will continue to do so and continue for people to reach out.

I've said it many, many times and I think many, many MHAs have reached out at various times. There is no minister, as I've said many times here today, that you work more closely with than the Minister of Finance and also the minister responsible for the Women's Policy Office at the time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

The MHA went on to say, and I quote: "It was the culture, it was the environment. It's the bad behaviour that's allowed to happen that puts people in situations where they question whether or not they are competent and if they're able to contribute."

Premier, these were not isolated incidents, but took place over a long period of time. It's a culture she refers to and an environment.

I ask the Premier: How could you have watched this happen and unfold over the last two-and-a-half years and not taken any action before now?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, I think when you look at the actions that this government has taken, you need to go right back to Bill 1 of this administration now about violence prevention, you look back at the committees that we put in place that will involve many ministers of this government.

We recognize there is a systemic problem within government. There is a systemic problem amongst legislatures all across this country, I would say all across the world.

We have taken this issue very seriously, as we said, and we are making decisions. I'm calling on every single Member in this House of Assembly to put in place a better workplace, collaboration. Using the experience that exists in this room will lead to a better workplace, a better working environment.

That's what I'm asking every Member of this House of Assembly, let's work together to get through these serious issues that we deal with.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Bill 1 didn't change anything about what was happening within the Premier's own Cabinet and what was happening within his own caucus. He knew exactly what was happening within those areas, the caucus and the Cabinet. The Premier's lack of action has made it okay for the intimidation and harassment to continue right under his own nose, in his own caucus room, in his own Cabinet room.

I ask the Premier again: Why did you let this terrible behaviour continue right before you and not take any action until the harassment concerns were made public last week?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do not tolerate questionable behaviour. As a matter of fact, I would suggest that the leader of the Opposition, when you look at in his own caucus, he seems to be very willing to tolerate questionable behaviour. We've seen that from his Members opposite. He agreed that blocking doors seems to be okay, Mr. Speaker. That's how the leader of the Opposition feels.

I will not tolerate questionable behaviour; I will not tolerate poor conduct. I think that is very evident in the decisions that I've made when just within the last week we've taken two ministers out of this government, Mr. Speaker. We've opened up a review that will be very thorough, using experts outside of government, if required, to make sure we make this a better place to work.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Premier: What action have you taken to ensure broader specialized expertise and independence that will allow a complete investigation of any alleged allegations?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If we go back to 2007 and the Green report, which was a significant report that was issued to the House of Assembly, Mr. Speaker, within that report there's a mechanism that is outlined in there to deal with the issues that are arising today. At that point, the Green report challenged Members of this House of Assembly to put in place a code of conduct for Members within the House of Assembly.

In that, once you call the Commissioner for Legislative Standards, which we've done, to start a review, Mr. Speaker, that person, that individual, that office could call on all the experts that are required, that are needed to make sure we have the best. That's what I've encouraged him to do, making sure that the resources would be available to that office.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Opposition House Leader.

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the former Finance minister was strongly opposed to the Commissioner for Legislative Standards conducting the investigation, based on her experience and support in an entity with a specialized expertise and experience conducting in such a matter.

I ask the Premier: Do you think this experience is relevant in looking forward to making the most complete and thorough investigation we can have for the issues that we're presented with?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, I think when you look at the situation that we're in today, it's incumbent on all of us to step up and give the advice and suggestions on what a process would look like. That's been done.

Mr. Speaker, we've made allowance for experts and for people from outside of this government, outside of the independent offices that exist within this government, to come in and to be included in the processes. There will be resources there that are required.

Those people that engage in this review, Mr. Speaker, it's important they are comfortable with the process. I've said that many times. They must be comfortable with the process as we move along into this and get this review started and then essentially completed with recommendations coming out of that. Yes, there is an allowance for independent resources, independent advice to come in to this review process.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I certainly acknowledge the Premier and what he described, but my question is: What assurance do we have that the appropriate expertise, professional services will indeed be a part of the investigation? It won't be optional, it will be guaranteed and those resources that are needed, and expertise, will be part of the investigation so when we're finished we have a complete report with those expertise involved in the process?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker, and I brought this information forward to the Commissioner for Legislative Standards. It was the only meeting that I would have had with him on this issue.

We brought this forward proactively and suggesting that there might be a need, there could be a need and I encouraged – as a matter of fact, I encouraged him to go out, or his office to go out and get the necessary expertise that's

required to make sure we get a very thorough review.

Mr. Speaker, just going through a check-in-the-box review, that is not what this is all about. I will guarantee the Members of this House of Assembly and I will guarantee the people of this province, it will be as thorough as required. The expertise that is required will be available to the Members that are engaged in this review process.

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.

Events of the past week clearly illustrate that there are problems with conduct at the highest levels of government. Changes to the system are needed to give everyone confidence that these problems are not repeated ever again.

I ask the Premier: What are you doing to reform Cabinet, caucus operations and the House of Assembly to make them a safe workplace?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would say that we put a – to begin with, I want to thank the Member. I know at this particular point in time, given what I've heard in the media, that these are difficult times for every single person in this House of Assembly; but, more importantly, very difficult times for the female Members that we have here. So I thank her for her question today. I'm very pleased to stand here in my place and talk about some of the changes we've put in place.

Mr. Speaker, harassment training is very important. As people would know, we put in place new policies that will be effective on June 1 of this year. We want to see better policies in place for Members of this House of Assembly. We've had some discussions that have been started already that we want to put to the House Management Commission. I'll have a meeting this afternoon with the leader of the Opposition.

I've already met with the Leader of the Third Party, Mr. Speaker.

I am committed, I am committed to making this a better place to work so we can get on with the business impacting Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and deal with issues inside of this House and outside of this House to make this House a better place to work and this province a better place to live.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: In fall of 2015, the Liberal Party's election platform promised – and I quote – that “a New Liberal Government will form an all-party committee on democratic reform.”

Premier, it is going on three years. When will you take action on democratic reform?

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

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

Again, this is one of the items that were put in my mandate letter by the Premier, to bring a resolution actually to the House for an all-party committee on democratic reform. I believe in multiple interviews that I've given with the media, I have said that it is something that we will have here in this House by spring of 2018.

We still have a significant amount of time to do that, but I look forward to working with all Members of this House to make this Legislature and our democratic process a better thing.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: When the Government House Leader was asked about this issue in January of this year, he stated in the media that I know there's a lot of talk academically about it. It's

not an issue on the radar for constituents that I deal with.

Premier, given the events of this past week, do you stand by your comment that democratic reform is not an issue that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are interested in?

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

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

Certainly I stand by what I said back in January, which was this democratic reform, which at the time we talked about voting, we talked about first past the post and we talked about issues like that. These were the issues even being brought to me by Members of the other side and by the academic community that I have been engaged in. These were not issues that were brought to me by members of my constituency or my members of the general public.

When it comes to reforming the House of Assembly, our Legislature, democratic institutions, that's something that I certainly have great interest in and I look forward to working with Members on the other side and people in this province to make our democratic process a better and more inclusive one.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. PERRY: In April 2017 the Government House Leader said to the media – and I quote – during the spring 2018 session that resolution will be debated in the House of Assembly.

Minister, will you honour your campaign promise, keep your word and create an all-party committee on democratic reform this session?

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, in my two years in this job there's never a word I've said in this House or outside that I don't stand by and

believe in. I do this job the same as all 40 Members of this House because I was given this great opportunity by the people of my district. I'm not going to let them down and I'm not going to let constituents of this province down. When I give my word, I stand by it.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Back in November 2016, the province's Teachers' Association pleaded with the Premier to remove the minister of Education after what they described as the minister having violated both the Premier's mandate letter and the code of conduct for Members of the House of Assembly.

I ask the Premier: Why did you not take these allegations seriously?

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think we've been very clear this week, the Premier has been very clear and has made leadership in the sense that he's taken very seriously any allegations that have come forward and has dealt with them, Mr. Speaker. The process is in place and we will continue to work through that.

There have been a lot of concerns and a lot of work that's gone into this. Obviously, the Premier has certainly moved forward on this. As soon as it came to his attention on an official allegation, then he acted on that, Mr. Speaker. We will see the process as we work through it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In June of 2016, the chair of the Federation of School Councils said that the minister of Education scolded him, saying that his negative comments regarding government could affect the group's chances of accessing funding.

Why did the Premier turn a blind eye to these allegations?

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think we've been very clear in this House that on official allegations that have come forward to the Premier, the Premier has acted very decisively, very quickly and has not taken any length of time in which he's made the decision that he has to make. He's made it official and has acted very quickly on that.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we will go through the process; I think it will be a very independent process. We will look at and see what the results of that report will be. Certainly, that will be taken in consideration at that time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island.

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

But these allegations were put forward over a year ago and no action was taken. In September of last year, 2017, the former minister of Education went on a public tirade against a school board trustee over a disagreement. He aggressively charged that the volunteer spread falsehoods and acted inappropriate.

What did the Premier not deal with the actions of the minister at that time?

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

MR. HAWKINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The items that the Member opposite is bringing up, I can't speak on what happened in the past, Mr. Speaker. I know what happened this week and the way in which the Premier dealt with it, in a very decisive manner and a very quick manner. He did not sit on information for a two-week period; he acted on it very, very quickly.

We now have a process in place to make sure the results of what will come forward, that this particular House will be a place where we can come in a safe working environment and people can express their opinion.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's incumbent on all of us to make sure that we have that type of rapport within our House, that we can come and comfortably be able to do that business that we have to do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, for the last week, the Premier and his government's dysfunction has taken over the work of the Legislature while the people of the province continue to face a serious fiscal crisis, the specter of soaring electricity rates, toxic chemical spills offshore, poverty and a host of other big problems.

I ask the Premier: Who exactly is in charge here? Why didn't he keep his own house in order so we could keep doing the work of the people in this House?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will assure you that, as Premier of this province, I am in charge.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER BALL: The issues that we face today within the House of Assembly are very serious and we are spending a lot of time dealing with that, there is no question about that. There are people out there in our province who are needing government and relying on government for the services they deliver.

You mentioned the rising prices of electricity; we had industry that has been struck with tariffs and so on. We are working on these issues. The role of government on these issues that you just mentioned has not changed and the work is ongoing and it will continue.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS. ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, two Cabinet ministers out, two Cabinet ministers complaining of harassment and the Premier still insists he knew nothing about any of these until a formal complaint was lodged last Wednesday.

I ask the Premier: Where is his leadership? Why didn't he stop this? Why is it he couldn't or didn't make his Cabinet a fair and collaborative workplace, rather than preside over the toxic, abusive situation we now know exists?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

When issues arise, you deal with them. I took prompt action. We did not sweep those things under the rug. We encouraged others to come forward, and others have.

I've reached out to both leaders – the Third Party and the leader of the Opposition – and I thank you for the discussion that we had yesterday. I think it's great. This will actually advance some of the discussions that we need on the floor of this House of Assembly. But not sweeping these issues under the rug, making sure that people are free to come forward is important in all of this and taking the prompt action that is required. We did that, Mr. Speaker, with the ministers that were involved and with the allegations that came forward. We have dealt with them and we'll continue to do so.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

The Premier keeps insisting he knew nothing of bullying or harassment in Cabinet before last Wednesday and continues to claim that he dealt with it promptly when he was formally made aware. It is becoming increasingly clear he oversaw a dysfunctional Cabinet and caucus for some time.

I ask the Premier: Why does he keep insisting he knew nothing before last Wednesday in the face of growing evidence to the contrary?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, when issues are raised by me, they were dealt with. The examples of that I think are very clear when you look at what happened last Wednesday, what has happened again yesterday. They are very unfortunate, and I've said that.

Decisions that this government would make through the Cabinet table and through other mechanisms that are required from a day-to-day basis and the operation of government impact people, Mr. Speaker. The decisions that are made at various Cabinet tables and committee tables and so on, they impact individuals in this House of Assembly.

I will not tolerate bullying. I will not tolerate intimidation. When these issues are raised, Mr. Speaker, we will deal with them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

The former minister of Finance says she had no choice but to leave Cabinet because of bullying by her colleagues. The Premier insists he first became aware of bullying when the complaint was filed last Wednesday.

I ask the Premier: If he was unaware of this bullying inside his own caucus, who was in charge? Who was running the show?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

PREMIER BALL: Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of meetings that occur within government, and I will tell you right now that I am in charge of this caucus. I am in charge and Premier of this province, and we will deal with the issues.

I would ask every Member of this House of Assembly to work in collaboration. These are systemic by nature. We know that, and we cannot tolerate this, Mr. Speaker. No one in this House of Assembly – people in this province have put faith in Members in this House of Assembly to put in place a functional Legislature.

It is incumbent on all of us to work together to bring improvements in this House of Assembly. I'm asking for every single leader that we have here, all 40 in this House of Assembly, to do their part to make this place a better place to work.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Time for 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 Burin - Grand Bank.

MS. HALEY: Mr. Speaker, I stand today to present the report of the Social Services Committee.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you.

Further reports by standing and select committees?

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, I give notice that I will on tomorrow move the following motion:

That notwithstanding Standing Order 9(1)(a), that this House meet at 2 p.m. on Thursday, May 3, 2018.

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 St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

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

Today, I hold a petition regarding universal public child care and after school care program. Here are the reasons for this petition:

Our licenced child care system is a patchwork of private-for-profit centres; 70 per cent of all centres, non-profit community-based centres and family daycare, plus a small number of education and workplace based centres. It is nowhere near meeting the child care needs in our province.

Affordable licenced child care is often in short supply in rural parts of the province. Even in St. John's there are long wait lists for quality child care programs.

Child care programs have both social and financial benefits for society. Studies show that high-quality child care and early childhood education programs result in better cognitive language and humorously skills. They help economically disadvantaged children transition to school on the same level as other children.

For every one dollar spent on early childhood education the benefits range from \$1.50 to \$2.78. Investing in child care creates jobs. One million dollars invested in child care would create 40 jobs more than in any other sector.

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

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

These petitioners, Mr. Speaker, fully understand that there's a difference between what happens from kindergarten to grade 12 and what happens prior to getting into kindergarten. People in the province are happy we have a full-day kindergarten, there's no doubt about that, but children's lives begin five years before that.

In countries around the world, especially in Europe and Scandinavian countries, there's child care for as early as six months. For two reasons, that it helps children's development, number one; and, number two, it helps parents be in the workplace at the same time that they have children.

What these petitioners are asking for, Mr. Speaker, is something that's not strange, it's not weird. It's something that goes on around the world. We sometimes look to a place like the United States as our model. That's not a model for good social services. When we look globally, we find good social services, mainly in Europe and in Scandinavian countries, as well as in other parts of the Commonwealth. Let's look to where there is publicly funded and publicly regulated child care and put it here into our own province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Further petitions?

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

MS. PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A petition to the hon. House of Assembly of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in Parliament assembled:

The residents of Hermitage and surrounding area depend on timely access to medical services. The amount of days that medical services are being provided at the Hermitage Medical Clinic has been reduced from two days per week to just two days per month.

Residents of the Hermitage area, including many seniors, must now travel approximately 50 kilometres to Harbour Breton to receive medical services and no public transportation is available in this area. The residents of the Hermitage area have expressed concerns about their ability to receive medical services in a timely manner, as well as safety concerns related to travelling for medical purposes.

Therefore, we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows:

The undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to extend operations at the Hermitage Medical Clinic to include an extra two days of services per month for a total of four days per month.

Mr. Speaker, the residents of Hermitage-Sandyville, Seal Cove, Gaultois and McCallum continue to be gravely concerned about the reduction in health care services that they are receiving in this particular part of the province. While we all realize and appreciate there are budgetary challenges with government, for the citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador, clearly nothing is more important than education and health care when it comes to our citizens' well-being.

We're able to find money for studies and we're able to find money sometimes for some things that perhaps one might consider frivolous. Why not take these types of expenditures, allocate them directly to front-line health care, Mr. Speaker. Keep the doctors and the nurses in our communities. That, in turn, will enable our residents to continue to want to live in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. One of the

detrerring factors for many is the continual attack on rural health care and the continual decline of services to rural areas.

We truly hope that government recognizes the error of that kind of thinking and restores health care to all persons of Newfoundland and Labrador and, in particular, restore services to the community of Hermitage.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Further petitions?

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

MR. LESTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

These are the reasons for this petition.

Port Blandford and surrounding region's economy is reliant on tourism and related outdoor activities. The forest in and around Port Blandford contributes heavily to a thriving tourism industry, employing many residents. The forest in and around Port Blandford sustains a large wildlife population including the once endangered and now threatened species, the Newfoundland marten. The council and residents of the community were not properly consulted before important decisions were made.

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

MR. SPEAKER: Further petitions?

The hon. the Government House Leader.

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

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

MR. SPEAKER: The Budget Speech.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to the budget.

As many colleagues in the House have started off their speech recognizing volunteers in Newfoundland and Labrador, I had the pleasure on Saturday night, being at a Lion's Club, the Sandy Cove Lion's Club. They celebrated their 40th anniversary. I had the pleasure of giving their first president and their current president a certificate of recognition and speak about the impact that these volunteers have on their community and region.

A very important aspect of the budget – in particular, I've given a speech before in the House of Assembly talking about two very important things you can do to advance your economy. Being the lead minister responsible for economic development in Newfoundland and Labrador, advancing telecommunication and advancing transportation networks are those two key things.

In this year's budget, I'm very proud that when the Minister of Finance read the speech, he highlighted there would be \$1 million dedicated to cellular pilot projects. This week, we announced a call to accept applications. I encourage all Members of this House to reach out to community groups, to providers, look at that application. There's a continuous intake up to September 30. It is a big issue for many of our rural communities as a means to improve and expand business and economic development in and around regions, expand tourism. Look at all of the opportunities that having advanced

telecommunication networks, like modern day cellular coverage, can provide.

This is a government that's innovative. That's taking steps forward to advance the economy of Newfoundland and Labrador and create opportunities for small business, and improve the quality of life of people living in rural Newfoundland and Labrador but also in urban economies as well, like the City of St. John's.

I will note that previously the former administration had made investments into broadband Internet, and we've continued to do so. We actually continued with our federal counterparts this time in \$1.5 million and was able to leverage almost a total combine between private sources and the federal government close to \$40 million in broadband coverage to help close gaps.

As anyone would know, when you're dealing with fixed wire line and when you're dealing with our vast geography it can be very costly to get into rural isolated communities. Some significant challenges exist, but when you build that backbone and you build that right infrastructure, like a major infrastructure network that's going into Southeastern Labrador, or Northern Labrador, how important that is, or how important in a small community like Bacon Cove or Kitchuses – the Member for Harbour Main has reached out time and time again. I was out meeting the Mayor of Conception Harbour of finding means of which broadband services can be provided.

If you look at the Labrador network, this is really interesting because if you can build a network to connect and create redundancy in a system, and build this circular system in Labrador and with the fibre line that is going across the Strait of Belle Isle, you can have a much better broadband connectivity and maybe we can connect to other jurisdictions like Nunavut or Greenland. There are opportunities.

We've been leaders in telecommunications. Heart's Content is a prime example of that. Back more than 150 years ago when Marconi launched the first transatlantic wireless signal that was done on Signal Hill. We have been leaders. We cannot afford to be laggards in Newfoundland and Labrador. We are a small

Island in the North Atlantic and we are at the edge of Mainland Canada when we look at the Mainland portion of our province in Labrador.

These are things where we have to be strategic. We have to make the right investments, and *Budget 2018* makes the right investments. It makes the right investments in how we expand tourism in Newfoundland and Labrador.

We did an exit survey in 2016. During that time, it highlighted the significant growth that's actually happening in tourism. That impacts all of our districts, almost every nook and cranny. There are 2,600 businesses and almost 20,000 jobs in tourism. That is up from 18,000 jobs in 2011. The job numbers are increasing when it comes to the tourism and hospitality sector, Mr. Speaker.

In 2016, tourism combined for resident and non-resident was \$1.13 billion. That is the most in our history. If you look at just non-resident in 2017, \$575 million was expended in tourism. That is the most in our history ever. It's quite exciting to see.

We continue with our award-winning ad campaign, but we also continue to do things differently as to how we look to improve access. Improving access can be something like the MOU that the Premier has signed with Quebec as to how you can look at Route 138. The Quebec government is looking at investing \$232.5 million in upgrading Route 138. If Route 138 is complete, then traffic will start flowing north, that's from the west, Ontario, Quebec and western.

We know that about 70 per cent of the traffic that comes into our Island flows that way. If you were to look at expanding tourism, what an opportunity to come up through Route 138, go into Labrador, maybe explore back through Quebec, or come into the Island and then either leave the Island through Port aux Basques or the port of Argentia. It could stimulate economic opportunity from trade and other commercial activity that would exist. That's why our department cost shared a study around the fixed link and looking at how we can expand transportation in Newfoundland and Labrador.

When we look at culture, Mr. Speaker, we've done a lot to look at renewing our cultural plan here because we recognize the last cultural plan was done in 2006. With that, we've seen growth in our cultural industries. Culture, as I'm talking about it, is more reflective of our cultural industries when we talk about film, when we talk about the performing arts, when we talk about literature and all of the aspects of music, et cetera. Culture is certainly much broader. Culture is our identity, it's our belief system, it's who we are. It touches every one of us.

We just launched – I was at The Rooms last night; it was a pleasure to be with a number of stakeholders in the community talking about renewing our cultural plan, which comes on the heels of the Status of the Artist legislation that we had enacted here in this province. As I read in the House earlier, we're establishing an arts accelerator program in Newfoundland and Labrador, where we can work with artists to help connect them to the appropriate level of supports that they would need for the promotion, for export, and all of those opportunities that come with the arts.

Film, Mr. Speaker, has been a broad success here in Newfoundland and Labrador. As the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation, we've been able to see how the local production companies here have done some incredible work with our Film Development Corporation and the staff there and how people are believing that we have such an industry that is developed here and that we have great infrastructure such as NIFCO, a co-op that was created, I believe, more than 40 years ago. These were the foundations, the innovation that's existing so that we can develop a thriving industry.

Government is there to support those people who are on the ground and the productions like *Little Dog*, the productions like *Caught*, *Frontier* and *Maudie*. My parliamentary secretary talked about *Maudie* here and the economic return to the province. When I was meeting with the Deputy Premier of Nova Scotia, she had highlighted, she said I can't believe that *Maudie* was filmed in Newfoundland and Labrador.

We have such a competitive industry here and we have great sets; we have great people who

understand it. We had actually gone out to Keels with the Member for Bonavista and actually got to tour, basically, what is the Hollywood of Newfoundland and Labrador where there former film sets like *Random Passage*, aspects of *The Shipping News*, Joe's Place from *The Grand Seduction*. They're all there.

If you look at what's happened there, there are 650 full-time equivalent jobs; \$50 million in just production work alone, and that's not counting the post-production work. So film is certainly something that I'm proud to see in the budget. Last year, there was \$5.4 million because of the opportunity to invest in *Caught*. This year we've maintained our doubling of the equity investment for film so we can continue to see growth in our film sector.

When we look at what we've done when it comes to innovation, we created InnovateNL. It was an ability to save over \$3 million when it comes to the roll up of RDC and bringing that into government, but the creation of the Innovation Council and the advice that it is providing and the direction that we are achieving through InnovateNL, through their advice around global locals, their advice through how we reach out to our networks, how we strengthen, how we grow.

The department is continuing – they're having a full-day meeting on this particular matter today – advice on how we capitalize on the ocean supercluster, an initiative that the Atlantic Canadian governments through our Atlantic Growth Strategy and by working together that local companies are stepping up, they're putting money on the table because they believe in the oceans, they believe in the opportunity that is here and they're going to capitalize on that federal investment coupled with their private sector investment. Our department has been supporting those initiatives. That is really key.

On Monday when we talk about finding means to curb our energy cost, I wish there was some Members from the House of Assembly that continue to promote and highlight companies that are doing the type of work like Empowered Homes, Mysa and the systems that they have created. These two young brothers have created a company that's employing 25 people, young

people right here in Newfoundland and Labrador in St. John's on Harvey Road.

It is really exciting to see this, when you go into their office, an open office environment and space and that energy, but the energy that is the benefit to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians comes from their product. They have created this thermostat and they have created an app system where we can sit right here at our desks, use our phone and that app and control all the temperatures in our home and save up to 20 per cent of our energy costs for the household homeowner.

This is really relevant, given the upcoming impacts of Muskrat Falls and the concern that's on the minds of everyone when it comes to the rising costs of electricity. These are all mindful that every one of us as legislators here in this House must be mindful of. So anything that we can do to promote energy efficiency, that we can do to mitigate the impact so that we can promote business and build that stronger Newfoundland and Labrador, we certainly must do.

I was very pleased to see the Minister of Health and Community Services in the budget and at the announcement with the Premier around mental health and addictions services and the announcement of the replacement of the Waterford Hospital with a new mental health facility and addiction facility that will be connected to the Health Sciences centre but also that there would be more community supports, supports in community.

With 183 community care beds, this is really critical that we find a means to provide those supports. The Doorways program that has opened up in numerous health centres and hospitals has been very positive. I will say that a recent investment – and the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island talked about addiction support groups. We've recently had one set up in St. Anthony and area serving the Great Northern Peninsula. I'm very pleased to see that they've just recently received a small sum of \$2,900 to help them out and help them grow. That is really important. These community groups and these community organizations that are doing good work have impact. Providing care close to home and in the

community does make a difference, Mr. Speaker.

I want to talk about something that I – and I'm sure all Members, particularly if you live in a rural district; I know the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's gets this quite a bit as well. I have about 650 kilometres of road in my particular district. At this time of year the concern about the grading of gravel roads, the potholes, the infrastructure and the maintenance that must be done to prepare for summer is a concern.

I'm very pleased to see that in the budget there's \$77 million for roadwork. There are a number of tenders that have gone out early in the District of St. Barbe - L'Anse aux Meadows and my constituents appreciate that. What I really appreciate is that there are multi-year road plans and infrastructure plans that have been created under the leadership of this Premier and the ministers that are leading the charge. These are very important.

When I sat in the Opposition in the past, there was always a significant discussion around the politics in pavement. There would be time and time again when there would be no roadwork in particular districts. Representing a district that is 650 kilometres of road, you could go almost year in, year out and not get a kilometre of paving and have some very terrible roads.

I'm very pleased to see that there's a tender that just closed for Route 433, Conche road, seeing kilometres for pavement. It's certainly something significant. I thank the minister and the former minister for any actions of them and their staff on this particular file and the constituents who certainly rely on this infrastructure day in and day out.

Having multi-year plans is important. The Premier has taken a real leadership role and a whole-of-government approach of making sure that our ministries are looking at strategic sectors.

The Minister of Fisheries and Land Resources has already been involved in Aquaculture Sector Work Plan. We've all been engaged on which role our departments can play in support and expand aquaculture in Newfoundland and Labrador and around agriculture and the

initiative around Crown land. If we look at the tech sector and the opportunities of scale ups and companies in Newfoundland and Labrador; *Advance 2030* as we take an approach for our oil and gas sector and how we can expedite the process of exploration, prospectivity and development; our provincial tourism product development plan; and in this year's *The Way Forward*, part three, it has been discussed about the approach and the importance of the community sector, as well as mining and the forest sector.

The forest sector and mining, when I look at my own district, never has it been a high area of where mining has been the focus. There has been a dormant marble mine there and there's been a little bit of exploration but, right now, there's a real lot of staking and prospectivity and excitement in my district around the potential of gold, zinc, other precious metals, and there's activity.

So it's nice to see that there is that opportunity and that prospectivity taking place, as well as opportunities in our forest sector. That is something that is really important to look at the fibre basket that we have and how it can be best utilized to create the jobs in Newfoundland and Labrador. I have the second largest, containerized international shipping port in the province in my district in St. Anthony, just next to Argentia, being number one. There is opportunity with CETA to do shipping, to do export, if we look at fibre products, if we look at minerals, if we look at fish products and the resources. There's a state-of-the-art cold storage. There's an application that's working through an EIP process of looking at development of a supply base in Crémaillère Harbour.

There are interests in our economy in Newfoundland and Labrador. We have been working on a number of files in the department of business throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. The Member for Burin - Grand Bank talked about all of her efforts into working and getting the Canada Fluorspar mine kick-started. She highlighted a number of great initiatives that's happening in all our economics and regions of the province.

I want to say that we have a significant amount of support when it comes to small business and

how we maintain a low small business tax. How a number of initiatives are taking place to support small business, whether it's through WorkplaceNL and their ability to lower rates, whether it's the outreach that we can do through our Business Development Support Program.

When we look at other aspects, I've taken on some responsibilities for Francophone Affairs and this interest – I've had the ability to travel with the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port. I appreciate his interest and given outside the St. John's area, he certainly represents the largest Francophone population in the province. If we look at the connectivity to programs and services, meeting with those groups were key. I had the ability to sign an agreement with Quebec that can expand cultural opportunities with Francophone groups throughout this province and that's important.

The parks of our province are getting kick-started, ready for opening. We've taken our reservations. If anybody knows anybody or whatnot, the reservations are still open. So let's encourage people to use and be active this summer our public system in the provincial parks, as well look at the private opportunities that exist for parks that are outside of provincial responsibility.

Seniors housing is critical, very important and timely, particularly in my district representing an aging population. Health care and investments in health care, and the budget here certainly puts forward a number of initiatives that I encourage all Members to support this budget because it certainly builds a stronger Newfoundland and Labrador, a stronger tomorrow.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Reid): The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

MS. MICHAEL: Well, actually the Leader of the third Party is not in the House.

MR. SPEAKER: Oh, sorry, the Member for St. John's East - Quidi Vidi.

Sorry, old habits die hard.

MS. MICHAEL: That's okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Well, here we are. We're speaking to the main motion of our budget and I'm very happy to be able to stand and speak to the main motion. We've been through the non-confidence motion and I was happy to vote for the non-confidence and, of course, government did not. Then we had the sub-amendment to the non-confidence motion and I was happy to vote with the Official Opposition on that. Although, of course, government didn't.

So now we are down to the main motion again and it's my last chance to talk about what the government has brought in this year and the effects of that, positive or negative, on the people of the province.

Once again, *Budget 2018*, government likes to call it a new budget, a different budget but in actual fact budget '18 is a continuation of the path that was set with *Budget 2016*. In many ways, it's a cut and paste from 2016. Maybe not so much pasting because they don't bother to refer to all the negative things that were in 2016. So I think they're hoping that people forget what was done in 2016. I think they're hoping that people will forget that things that they had prior to 2016 are gone, that programs have been reduced, that things that they expected to be able to have in their lives are gone since 2016.

Government seems to be using all kinds of paper and all kinds of words to have people think they're being taken care of. When I say that this is a cut-and-paste budget from 2016, it's also a cut-and-paste budget with all the paper that government is using.

I find it interesting when I read through the different sheets that government produces with the budget on various issues, you find things repeated. For example, I look at the sheet that's called Our Financial Plan and it says: "... Building for Our Future continues our government's balanced approach to supporting our province's communities and families while helping to create new business and employment opportunities."

My first thought is, balanced approach, I have not seen a balanced approach. I see an approach

of the government sticking its heels in, trying to reduce the deficit, trying to do that and getting some businesses to benefit while, at the same time, people are suffering in the province.

But talk about cut and paste. I go to another page called Building for Our Future – Budget 2018 Focused on Delivering Valuable Programs and Services While Returning to Surplus, and I read: "Building for Our Future continues government's balanced approach to supporting communities and families throughout the province while helping to create new business and employment opportunities."

The same sentence there as here, and that's basically what this budget is all about, Mr. Speaker, just shoving words around, shoving dollars around and not really being built on the needs of the people of the province. They can say all they want that it's a balanced approach that's helping communities and families as well as creating new business and employment opportunities, and my answer to the government is that they're doing neither one of those two things and it's not a balanced approach.

It shocks me to look at what this government is putting forward in this budget. The last time I stood and talked about what was in the 2016 budget they kept shouting at me that well, this was 2018, it wasn't 2016. But I claim that this is no different than the 2016 budget. Because everything that was in the 2016 budget gets continued in this budget and cuts that were made, changes that were made, programs that were taken away, all of that still exists.

When government presents their financial plan and in the financial plan they talk about the decisions that have helped to maintain their course, their course with regard to fiscal targets, everything they're talking about are things that really don't relate to the lives of people, and that's the problem with the budget and that's a problem with all this paper. They don't relate to the lives of people, because their main goal is that fiscal target of reducing the deficit and bringing it down to zero.

That's fine and dandy to try to do that when you have revenues coming in and you can help people at the same time, but what they've done by focusing on those targets, on their fiscal

targets, their fiscal goals, people have suffered and continue to suffer, Mr. Speaker. This is something they don't want us to talk about. It's something they say we're just being negative when we point it out, but we know what's going on in the lives of people. So when we say that it's not to be negative. It's to point out reality.

When we look at their fiscal plan, they look at the targets which are targets based on fiscal policies but not really based on meeting the needs of people, we say: what's there for people? I look at the actions, and once again that famous word balance. Our financial plan is one of balance.

They talk about the changes to taxation that support consumers and businesses. Well, yes, the auto insurance is going down, that's good. I'm not saying that's bad. You will have 33 per cent of the retail sales tax on auto insurance will be eliminated over four years. That's not a bad thing, but when you go on from there all the different measures that are put in place really don't relate to the community as a whole.

It's really good that the budget introduces a search and rescue volunteer tax credit. That's really good for those who are working and doing volunteer work in search and rescue. It's really, really important but they're a small part of the community.

They have in here an action, which is part of their financial plan, and the action is, an independent review of the public post-secondary system will be undertaken. Well, I think that's needed. I'm not sure that's part of a financial plan. I'd like to see that connection.

Then government are talking about anticipating savings of \$5.2 million as a result of cost-saving measures to manage government expenses, including reducing discretionary spending. We've been through Estimates now for a few weeks and we're getting different examples of reducing discretionary spending, and that's good.

I'm not knocking saving \$5.2 million, but when I pair that off against what's happening to people in the province I would like to see the savings, the \$5.2 million savings not just be savings going out into mid-air saying we're

reducing our deficit more. I'd rather see those savings, that are savings from discretionary spending, go towards a program that will help people in the province. This is a great fiscal plan they have.

They also will consolidate the vehicle fleet under one department. Again, this is part of their financial plan and they will save hundreds of thousands of dollars over the long-term. Once again, I haven't a problem with saving that money but the thing is I'd like to see the savings of that money going towards the people of this province.

They're also continuing to pursue the sale of surplus land and building and equipment, which is a good thing. I'm not against that but, once again, when those savings are tallied up, I don't want to see that money at this point in time going to putting the deficit down. I want it going to help people.

Let's look at some of the things that happened to people with 2016 and that are being continued now, Mr. Speaker, being continued in the lives of people. In 2016, we had eight Advanced Education, Skills and Labour offices closed. These are offices that help people with income support issues and employment issues.

Mr. Speaker, noting that our employment is going down and our unemployment is going up, I would say that more than ever we need AESL offices in this province. Why wouldn't the government look at that if they're going to have some savings from the vehicle fleet, for example? Let's get some of these offices opened again.

Bring back bus passes and transportation benefits to low-income people. Just imagine that \$5.2 million I mentioned that will be the result of cost-saving measures due to reducing discretionary spending, I bet that \$5.2 million could go pretty far in helping people with bus passes and transportation benefits; low-income people trying to get to medical appointments, for example, and not able to afford the bus passes. We're talking about here in the St. John's, Mount Pearl area obviously when we talk about the bus passes. Low-income people not able to get to appointments having to walk long distances to appointments because they don't

have bus passes because they can't afford them. Yet, we're saving \$5.2 million in discretionary spending in order to bring down our deficit.

Let's look at something else. What about the grant portion – well, we have the grant and loans for our students. What we're asking for and what students are asking for is increase the grant portion and decrease the loan portion for students in the province. Why not help our students who are in post-secondary education so they can get a better education and get better jobs, hopefully here in the province if government had a job creation plan, which it doesn't really have. They have measures in place that they say is going to create jobs without any proof that jobs are going to be created. So it's not really a job creation plan.

What else could savings and discretionary spending – or the hundreds of thousands of dollars in making a better vehicle, cutting down on the vehicles, the vehicle fleet, consolidating it. They're saying we'll save hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Imagine where that hundreds of thousands of dollars could go for reinstating grants to the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador. It certainly wouldn't take hundreds of thousands of dollars to give them back their grants. The Heritage Foundation is something that's so important. Important with regard to our culture, important with regard to people's knowledge of our history and important for the tourism industry, for example, because the work they do is work that could really make our tourism more attractive to people. I keep talking about this, there are so many ways out there we could be building our tourism by looking at our history and our geography.

What else? Oh, the Labrador Air Foodlift Subsidy. Imagine how much they'd be happy up in Labrador if some of the hundreds of thousands of dollars that are being saved because of the consolidation of the vehicle fleet, if that were to go towards the Labrador Air Foodlift Subsidy. Something that's so important, Mr. Speaker, for Labrador in the winter to have good food, to have fresh food for the communities on the North Coast, for example – well, that's mainly where it is, the North Coast – for them to have what they need to be healthy

which is important for health prevention, for making sure that people are healthy, that they're getting the nutrition they need.

What about the class sizes for grades four to nine? They raised the class sizes in 2016. Why not lower those class size caps for grades four to nine? Why not do that? Imagine what that would do. Number one, it would bring the pupil-teacher ratio down to what is a better ratio for the learning for the children. Number two, it would mean more teachers hired, and more teachers hired means employment going up. Employment going up helps the economy. This government doesn't seem to understand that connection between people being employed and the impact on the economy if people are not employed.

The people who work are consumers. The more income they have, the more they put out as consumers and that helps the economy. It's such a simple economic fact that this government doesn't seem to get. So just imagine what would happen if we had more teachers being hired, very important, important for the economy and important for the education of our children.

The same way with the original allocation ratio for high school. Let us get back to – we were moving on a track that was good for the children of our province, good for the families of those children, good for teachers, good for our whole system and then it all got shaken up in 2016 with this government's decisions.

The same thing, we have the combined grades that were put in place to finance full-day kindergarten. The former minister of Education – I hope the new one is not going to continue down this track – criticized me, in particular, over and over and over again when I talked about full-day kindergarten, that I was against it when it was brought in here.

I wasn't against full-day kindergarten. I'm still not. I'm absolutely for it and have always spoken for it, but at the time that government brought it in, what happened? In order to finance the full-day kindergarten, other people in the school system lost out. So you had combined grades that were put together to come up with allocations for teachers for the full-day kindergarten because, obviously, you were going to have to have more teachers.

So instead of seeing this as an opportunity to hire more new teachers, an opportunity to have more people in the province employed, an opportunity to have more of our students coming out of Memorial University with their degrees as teachers employed here in the province, rather than seeing the full-day kindergarten as an opportunity for that, full-day kindergarten was literally used, at this point in time, as a way to help this government with its great fiscal goal of reducing the deficit. I mean, it's unbelievable.

I remember at the time one of my arguments was: If we can't bring in full-day kindergarten without hurting the rest of the system, then it shouldn't come in until we're ready to do it, but this is what happened. So why doesn't this government put a plan in place to undo the damage that was done, hire more teachers and help the educational system itself as well as the economy?

Some other things we're still hearing and I'm still hearing in my office for sure is the loss of the intensive core French throughout the education system, and parents are not happy about that. Soon, they'll forget that it existed. Give it a couple of more years and they'll forget that it even existed, the intensive core French. Why not bring that back?

Again, it's the short-sightedness of the government that upsets me because having children who are bilingual in our two official languages gives them better opportunities down the road when it comes to employment. There are more and more positions both here in our own province as well as throughout the country that become open to you if you are bilingual in our two official languages, and the intensive core French really helped with that whole process.

It's not just something that's good for an individual child, oh yeah, you can speak French or you can speak English, you can speak both the languages, isn't that nice; that's not what it's about. It's about that. It's also about helping our children to be citizens who are aware of the more than one culture that we have. If they become aware of those two languages, it opens them up to a multicultural notion, which is so important both in this province and in our

country because of immigrants coming in, for example.

There are so many nuances to the whole thing of having intensive core French. It so much more than what this government must have thought it was and then, as I mentioned already, you have the economic part of it.

What else? We also had, with regard to the class caps, we had class caps for French immersion as well through grades four to nine which was a terrible idea. Something else that could be undone. I'm just imagining none of this takes a lot of money but the hundreds of thousands of dollars being saved because of consolidation of the vehicle fleet, how many places could that \$100,000 be used, for the good of the people, for the good of families, for the good of children, for the good of our children as they move into young adulthood, for the good of our overall community?

As they are better off, as they are employed, as they have income coming in, as they are healthier, we have a stronger economy. Once again, I stand here in frustration because this government seems to have no understanding of that connection between the social benefits and economy, something which they've learned a long, long time ago in Europe and in Scandinavian countries.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Mr. Speaker, our government continues to make investments which are greatly benefiting the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. The Five-Year Provincial Roads Plan ensures the best value for every dollar is invested and the full use of Newfoundland and Labrador's short construction season is used.

Mr. Speaker, our government took the politics out of pavement.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Again and again we have heard the Opposition argue against the ranking process in this House of Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, engineering assessments and thresholds were developed in consultation with the department's engineers. The ranking involves an assessment of measures such as reliability, safety and usage. The engineering assessment process is reviewed annually and improved to account for changes in such things as technology or user needs.

The public are also engaged, Mr. Speaker. In November of 2017 more than 470 submissions were received from the general public identifying various road-related issues. These submissions were considered in the development of this year's plan.

This year, Mr. Speaker, 5.5 kilometres of the old Placentia road, also known as the Nine-Mile Road in the District of Placentia - St. Mary's between Salmonier Line and Colinet, will be pulverized and paved. This is a multi-year plan that will continue into 2019 and 2020.

Mr. Speaker, this is a plan. This is how you take the politics out of pavement. You use guidelines, safety is assessed and traffic volume is assessed. You do not pave a road for votes.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: There are many roads in my district in poor condition. If we didn't take the politics out of pavement, Mr. Speaker, as the Members opposite claim, I wouldn't have the fourth-worst road in Atlantic Canada by the CAA. In fact, that exists in Markland. We have taken the politics out of pavement.

We would have shiny, new black pavement but that's not the situation. However, I, Mr. Speaker, will continue to ensure these roads are assessed and I will advocate for pavement. Pavement through a process is how you take the politics of pavement. You don't buy votes with pavement, you assess the roads and you pave based on the highest need, using the plan that was established by the Department of Transportation and Works. I understand that this is a new process for the Opposition, but it's a fair equitable process that

works to ensure the safety and security of the motoring public.

Mr. Speaker, everyone who has driven over a road in this province knows that we have been experiencing issues with pavement for years. Unlike the past government, Mr. Speaker, we are working to arrive at a solution by testing the pavement. An asphalt testing pilot project began in 2017-18 to examine the asphalt specifications best suited for our province's climate and environment.

Five sections of the Trans-Canada Highway between Foxtrap and Holyrood were paved using different types of liquid asphalt. Each section is less than one kilometre in length and will be monitored twice annually, once in the spring and once in the fall, to determine how well it is performing based on factors such as traffic volume and weather conditions. The first monitoring is scheduled to take place in the spring of 2018. When we identify a problem, Mr. Speaker, we fix the problem. We don't ignore the problem.

Since I became the Minister of Service NL, the department responsible for the *Highway Traffic Act*, our government introduced Bill 27. It includes a new offence for driving without due care and attention or without reasonable consideration for other persons causing bodily harm or death.

Mr. Speaker, I have stood many times in this House of Assembly and I have spoken to the importance of constantly reviewing legislation to ensure it is meeting the needs of the people it serves. Mr. Speaker, that is what we have done and that is what we, as a government, will continue to do.

Placentia - St. Mary's is steeped in history and tradition and is also renowned as a great place to do business. It offers tremendous opportunities for growth and success for businesses large and small. Argentia Gold Corporation is aiming to complete construction of an 80,000 square foot facility to produce medical cannabis in Argentia. They hope to begin in the fall.

On May 26, 2017, it was announced that Husky was moving forward with the West White Rose Project. The 25-year project is estimated to

generate \$3 billion in economic benefits for the province in the form of royalties, taxes and equity payments. Approximately 700 people will be employed at the Argentia site during the peak construction season. It will create 250 permanent platform jobs and up to 1,500 more direct and indirect jobs. Mr. Speaker, this government is working to employ people in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. GAMBIN-WALSH: Private business owners and government-supported organizations are continuing to employ the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador. Government's commitment to economic development is evident everywhere you turn in the District of Placentia - St. Mary's. We continue our commitment to improved outcomes and better services for the people of our province. These many examples show the progress we, in fact, Mr. Speaker, are making.

The benefits of a healthy active lifestyle are well documented. Our government is committed to supporting and promoting healthy active living for all ages. Since being elected, Mr. Speaker, I have had the privilege of attending the official opening ceremonies for two playgrounds in the District of Placentia - St. Mary's: Hopeall and Southeast. I also assisted Dunne Academy in St. Mary's with the revitalization of their playground. They now have an accessible playground. We are investing in our children by ensuring they have a safe and secure place to grow and a place to play. Recreation for all ages is very important. This past summer I attended the Placentia Regatta and this winter the Placentia Winter Carnival.

Mr. Speaker, it is important that we maintain a strong focus on the fishing industry which continues to be an important sector not only for my district, but our province as a whole. The Department of Fisheries and Land Resources continues to work to revitalize and develop traditional and emerging industries that will support and sustain a better future for Newfoundland and Labrador.

My district received approximately \$200,000 under the Seafood Innovation and Transition Program. This program focuses on technologies

and innovations which help place our province in a position to avail of opportunities on the international market. Our government will continue to make strategic investments required to further develop the fishing sector.

Tourism is a vital industry in Newfoundland and Labrador. From Come Home Year celebrations that I attended in Fox Harbour, St. Vincent's and Branch, to entertaining musicals at the Placentia Cultural Arts Centre, the district is and was alive this past summer with visitors. Mr. Speaker, we have a thriving tourism industry in the District of Placentia - St. Mary's.

The numerous antique car shows and whale watching at St. Vincent's beach drew people from all over the world. The Doctors inn in Green's Harbour, an award-winning oceanfront inn, spa, fine-dining restaurant, wedding and event venue. It consists of 100 acres overlooking Trinity Bay, gardens, trails, animal farm and sunsets over the bay. Mr. Speaker, this government is invested in tourism.

I am proud to say this government is committed to providing services that are fundamental to the social and economic well-being of individuals and families. *Budget 2018* continues to provide support to seniors, women, children and persons with disabilities. We are committed to inclusive communities, Mr. Speaker, and *Budget 2018* proves that; \$400,000 for accessible transportation options through our accessible taxis and retrofitting or acquiring accessible vehicles for personal use; \$75,000 for inclusion grants to non-profit community organizations.

Mr. Speaker, it was this government, in fact, that enhanced benefits for injured workers. It was this government that took the stat report down off the shelf and increased the income replacement rate from 80 to 85 per cent. It was this government that put injured workers first.

Mr. Speaker, since becoming the minister responsible for Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation, I noticed that we had a problem at the appeals board. This was not a new problem, as the previous administration had hired additional commissioners in an attempt to deal with it. I can honestly say that after reviewing the issue it was very evident to me, as the minister, that in fact what the previous

administration had done was put a band-aid on the problem.

I am happy to report to this House that a request has been sent to the Independent Appointments Commission to hire another full-time review commissioner. This will allow three full-time commissioners, along with three part-time commissioners, to focus on the work at hand. I will be paying close attention to the needs of the appeals board and I will be supporting them to ensure this important work is completed in a very timely fashion.

Mr. Speaker, on March 28, I stood in this House of Assembly as the minister responsible for Occupational Health and Safety, I stated that I would direct my Occupational Health and Safety Advisory Council to review workplace harassment and violence in the workplace. In fact, Mr. Speaker, on Friday, April 27, I met with my committee for the first time and did just that.

This has been a very difficult two weeks in the House of Assembly, for me personally and as a female politician, but I am committed to this government, to my colleagues, to my constituents. Mr. Speaker, this government has proven that we are committed to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Once again, it's a privilege and an honour to rise here in my seat in the hon. House of Assembly on behalf of the people of Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune. Before I get into my final budget debate – we're on the third phase of the budget debate – I would like to join my colleagues in extending sincere congratulations to Mr. Ches Crosbie on becoming the new Leader of the PC Party of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS. PERRY: We had a very inspirational weekend, Mr. Speaker, and there was great energy in the room. It was a very positive feeling to see the excitement in the room and the energy as we look forward to 2019. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Tony Wakeham as well. Certainly for any person to come forward to put their name forward to run as a Member of the House of Assembly, it's commendable. I commend all persons of all parties and all stripes for doing so, because it is absolutely crucial we have good governance. In order to have good governance, we need to have good people at the table.

I am extremely confident that in both Mr. Crosbie and Mr. Wakeham we have true integrity, true honesty, very keen intellect and they will be two of 40 fabulous candidates that the PC Party will put forward as an alternative for governance in 2019, Mr. Speaker. We look forward to having a fabulous party and continuing to build on all the fabulous people who are already here.

Mr. Speaker, today I'm going to talk a little bit about some of the challenges that we encounter in this province but I'm also going to talk about some of the positive things that are on the horizon for Newfoundland and Labrador. I guess in the interest of trying to balance the good with the bad, I'll perhaps start with the Roads Plan. I think I feel comfortable in saying it is nice to hear the concept of taking politics out of roadwork, but I remain to be convinced that it actually has been removed, and certainly it can easily be clarified if the department was willing to share the matrix information, show us how the evaluation has taken place and actually be true to transparency. Provide the matrices, Mr. Speaker, and then perhaps we may be a little bit more convinced that the politics has been removed.

From the point of view of contractors, knowing what work is on the horizon and from an efficiency point of view, five-year planning is a good concept, Mr. Speaker.

One of the areas that the Liberal government, both provincially and federally, are moving into with respect to the carbon tax is indeed very worrisome. No one at either the federal or provincial level has been able to answer how

another tax is actually going to decrease the problem of carbon pollution. That's very concerning, Mr. Speaker, because what will happen – will they use all the money? Where will it go? Will it go into general revenue and help pay for schools and roads, or will it go into a special pot of money that will be allocated based on – we have no idea.

Mr. Speaker, there are some really big concerns about this being just a grab to get extra money in the till for politicians to spend and that's of great concern, especially when the taxation burden on Canadians and Newfoundlanders and Labradorians is excessive. It's too excessive, Mr. Speaker, and certainly in our province it's driving people away.

When the full impact of the federal changes come into play, each and every one of us will be hit with an additional \$2,200 in taxation, not including the carbon tax by the federal government, Mr. Speaker. We need a government that's going to stand up to Ottawa and say no, no, hang on, this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador is actually contributing to reducing carbon emissions and pollution by establishing clean green energy.

We deserve credit for that, Mr. Speaker, and we deserve to have a break, in my opinion, on the carbon tax that the federal government is saying they're going to impose in January. We need strong leadership to say to Ottawa we are not going to stand by and allow you to impose another burdensome tax on our economy, especially at a time when we are facing economic challenges and we need as much support as we possibly can get from Ottawa in terms of trying to get through these challenging times.

I am certainly not a proponent of carbon tax and not a proponent of the fact that the Liberal provincial government refuses to stand up to Ottawa and say no. These are some of the issues, Mr. Speaker, that are certainly of grave concern to many of us who live here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

There are good things happening in Newfoundland and Labrador. I was very pleased; I had a discussion, actually, with the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and

Innovation just yesterday about a new prospecting opportunity that's happening near Bishop's Falls and along the Bay d'Espoir Highway when it comes to prospecting for gold. We were very pleased to see that.

It's certainly going to be a project that will take many, many years. But should it come to fruition, Mr. Speaker, it's going to create significant employment in Newfoundland and Labrador. Because of the vision of the Progressive Conservatives in identifying that if we are going to attract businesses to Newfoundland and Labrador, if we are going to improve the amount of mining activity that happens in Newfoundland and Labrador, we needed the power to be able to provide to these companies. Muskrat Falls is going to provide us with that power, so hopefully these prospecting opportunities turn into mines and we, as a province, will have the infrastructure in place to support these mining companies.

I recall when I was in university some 20-odd years ago, closer to 30 now, it really struck me in one of my classes when a professor said – and he was actually from Ontario. He told our class about the Churchill Falls deal and the grave injustice that was done to Newfoundland and Labrador at the time back in the '70s. He said too bad for you, Newfoundland and Labrador, but thank you for us from Ontario because we got all your power and we got all the companies and businesses to go with it.

Muskrat Falls is going to allow us to attract those companies and businesses to our fine province, Mr. Speaker. The good days are coming once again for Newfoundland and Labrador based on a renewable resource. As we all know, oil is a non-renewable resource. There will come a day when there is no oil left to drill, but as long as the water flows, we can have clean, green renewable energy. This is a very viable industry which can provide billions and billions and billions of dollars for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador for decades and decades to come, similar to how Quebec has enjoyed the wealth of our resources for the past 40 years.

That day is coming for Newfoundland and Labrador. It's on the horizon, with the right leadership. Certainly, I know I, for one, would

be vehemently opposed to any type of sale of our clean, green assets to any other province or any other private sector company. This is the people's company. It is the people's resource, and the wealth that will come belongs to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. I remain committed and supportive of Muskrat Falls and I remain convinced that it will, in years to come, bring us great wealth.

Now, Mr. Speaker, another fabulous opportunity for Newfoundland and Labrador is tourism. In my particular part of the province, down in the Coast of Bays, we have significant untapped tourism potential. Many people who do take the time to travel off the beaten path, as they say, marvel at what they see when they arrive in the Coast of Bays region. Many compare it to the beauty of the West Coast. We have similar fords to Gros Morne. In fact, we have mountains that don't quite rival Gros Morne but they are close.

There's a reason I'm bringing that up in particular, Mr. Speaker. I've had the privilege of actually climbing Gros Morne Mountain twice, once when I was completing my gold Duke of Edinburgh Award and another time when I was going as an adult volunteer to assist other youth who were pursuing their gold Duke of Edinburgh Award. A very, very grilling climb, and I got a T-shirt at the time that said: I survived Gros Morne Mountain. I think when I finish politics I'm going to get another one that says: I survived politics in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Gros Morne Mountain is certainly a fabulous place. We have a mountain that is similar in the Coast of Bays region and we call it Iron Skull. I also had the pleasure and privilege of climbing that mountain too, Mr. Speaker, but why I wanted to mention in particular Iron Skull today – and I'm going to link it back again as well to our potential for mining right here in the province.

When I was the executive director for the Coast of Bays Corporation, which was one of 20 regional economic development boards, there had been some interest at the time in establishing a rock quarry in Belleoram. The aggregate that would be produced from this quarry would be shipped to the Eastern Seaboard. The operation was identified as

having the potential to create up to 100 jobs for about five decades.

Then, of course, we got into the economic recession and the downturn around 2007-2008 and things slowed down at that time, but I'm very pleased to say that it looks like interest has been renewed once again in the Belleoram rock quarry. I hope everyone stays tuned to future developments that may be arising in that regard. We certainly believe that all areas of Newfoundland and Labrador have significant potential with the right leadership in years to come.

Often at times when we've stood up in this hon. House, Members opposite have challenged us to provide ideas for how we can grow the economy of Newfoundland and Labrador. I, for one, was pleased to stand here in my place and identify, as an economic opportunity, a road to the Burin Peninsula from the Coast of Bays.

Presently, we have a ferry service for an isolated community, Rencontre East. This ferry service runs from Pool's Cove to Rencontre to Bay L'Argent. At times, we have challenges with respect to the ferry service because, of course, just weather alone can sometimes prevent that ferry from operating.

There are often issues around breakdowns, which are all normal, but if there were a road the people of Rencontre would never have a problem accessing a doctor in a time of emergency because they could drive to the Burin Peninsula or they could drive to Harbour Breton, drive to Grand Falls and avail of the services they need.

We see such a road as being of economic benefit as well to tourism because it would actually create a loop so that people who were travelling the Burin Peninsula or travelling to Central Newfoundland could come through the Coast of Bays and drive out by a different route and enable them to see more of our fine province.

We believe there's great merit in pursuing this. It is 72 kilometres across. The route has been mapped by a surveyor, Mr. Bill Wall, who is no longer with us on this earth, but after he retired he took the time, of his own accord, of his own expense, to track across the country there and

map out the route that could be utilized to provide a road.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS. PERRY: I would put forth that such a road would also enhance, not just tourism, not just mining, not just health care, it would also enhance aquaculture, especially with the industry growing on both sides of Fortune Bay. Nothing but good could come from a road to the Burin Peninsula, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly something my constituents would really like to see happen, and it's something that I believe would create significant employment for many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Those economic benefits would continue well beyond the construction phase by enabling other industries to grow and flourish, Mr. Speaker.

I truly hope it is something that the Liberal government is willing to look into. I certainly assure my constituents that in 2019, should we have a Progressive Conservative government, it is something we will look into, Mr. Speaker. It's something that I will certainly advocate for and be relentless in my avocation because I think it at least deserves a feasibility study. If we can do a feasibility study into a tunnel to Labrador or for a railway, then certainly we can do a feasibility study into road access versus ferry services for the Coast of Bays region in this particular portion of our coast. It's a viable study I think that's worth undertaking and one I would certainly be strongly supportive of.

Mr. Speaker, we're winding down the debate here today in terms of we're now back to the main motion for *Budget 2018*. Like my colleague from St. John's East - Quidi Vidi said, when we are in Estimates it's actually encouraging to see the ministers point out areas where they have found cost savings. What's very, very disappointing, though, is those cost savings aren't being deployed to reduce the deficit and to reduce spending. They are being actually found and then government is creating new areas of expenditures and actually increasing spending.

After telling us for two years we had a spending problem, they continue to increase day-to-day

spending for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. That is worrisome, Mr. Speaker. If we're finding savings we should be deploying them to reduce the deficit instead of finding new areas to spend in.

We have to make choices. There are a lot of things we want. One of the things my husband always says to me when I talk about things like wanting a new kitchen, he says, Tracey, wants and needs. It's all about wants and needs. Sure you want it, but do you need it. That's what we have to ask ourselves as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians when it comes to the fiscal situation we're in. It's important for each and every one of us to be prudent in that regard.

Mr. Speaker, my time is nearly up, and before I conclude today in this Budget Speech where we are able to speak about anything, I want to take this opportunity to thank my female colleagues in this House of Assembly for coming forward to try and embrace – not to try, I think we're going to succeed, Mr. Speaker – change in how parliaments operate. Not just the Parliament of Newfoundland and Labrador, not just the Legislature of Newfoundland and Labrador, but all legislatures.

The old boys club, I think the day for that has gone. We are in the 21st century; our workplace needs to reflect that we are in the 21st century.

I thank my female colleagues for coming forward. I thank all my hon. colleagues here, both men and women, for their support. I also thank the public of Newfoundland and Labrador. It is your words of encouragement that give us the strength to continue. Together we will create a better day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Member for Windsor Lake.

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

As it always is, it's a pleasure to stand in this House to speak and represent the people of the District of Windsor Lake. I know everybody in this House very much takes a few minutes to

recognize their own district when they speak, particularly when they speak to the budget. I certainly don't want to be an exception to that.

It's a real privilege to represent the district that I do because of the diversity and the multicultural nature of Windsor Lake, whether it's events at the Temple or events at MacMorran Community Centre, whether it's hanging with the kids up at Roncalli in Airport Heights. It's a real privilege to be able to represent constituents who are very passionate about our province, very educated, enlightened and also, I would say, passionate like every other Member's constituents are – every other set of constituencies that we represent, that there is an opportunity for things to be better in our province, Mr. Speaker. I think that's why we sit in this House of Assembly, to make tomorrow a little bit better than yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, I'd be remiss if I didn't acknowledge that today has been a very difficult day for me. While those comments are ones that I'll keep outside of the House, I think it's important to recognize that it probably has also been difficult for my colleagues. I respect the fact that they have been nothing but courteous and nothing but respectful here in the House today. I appreciate that.

Mr. Speaker, with regard to *Budget 2018*, it's a privilege to stand and speak and, I guess, remind the House of some of the notes that the Finance Minister spoke about in his opening speech when the budget was introduced.

This particular fiscal year, the Finance Minister and the government is revising the deficit for 2017-18 to \$812 million, which was an improvement from the mid-year forecast which is certainly something we're pleased with. This also includes the severance expenses under the new collective agreement which total about \$37 million.

The deficit for this fiscal year of '18-'19 is projected at \$683 million. That includes \$52 million for the remaining one-time severance expenses as those severance payouts straddle fiscal years. This is an increase from *Budget 2017* forecast of \$644 million.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things, though, I have noticed in the debate from the Opposition is a

continuing reference to spending and their belief that spending – I wouldn't say believe, their statements in this House that spending increases are reflected in this year's budget.

I challenge them to read the documents maybe a little more closely to understand exactly where those expenditures are coming from and make sure they understand that the expenditures are not a reflection of new initiatives. They are a reflection of prior decisions that have been made by former governments that result in expenditures that have to be honoured and obligations that have to be met in this fiscal year, but this is where we debate. Everybody has their own perspective about what we read, but I'd certainly challenge my hon. colleagues across the aisle to take a look maybe a little bit deeper into those numbers.

Mr. Speaker, the revenues for this year, for *Budget 2018*, include revenues of \$7.67 billion which is an improvement of \$12 million from *Budget 2017* forecast. I think that's certainly good news.

We've seen in the last number of months, the risk around oil prices. We've seen a benefit to the Treasury and we'll continue to see a benefit to the Treasury from increased oil prices. While I've certainly been on the record and I know many Members of the caucus on this side of the House and some on the opposite side of the House have spoken very clearly that oil is not the solution and we need not be reliant on oil prices as the singular solution to our fiscal challenges, we will take relief any way we can find it. I think it's certainly helpful this year that we see those oil prices moving in a direction that's helpful for the provincial Treasury.

Mr. Speaker, I do want to zone in a little bit on the borrowing and talk a little bit about where we are this year with the borrowing forecast that the Finance Minister has presented to the House. Gross borrowing for *Budget 2018* will be \$1.45 billion lower than the original budget of 2017 forecast at \$1.6 billion. That's certainly a positive piece of information.

As somebody who, as everybody in this House knows, in my experience here as a Member of this House of Assembly had a responsibility to support government's work in borrowing, we

were left, the province more importantly, the people of the province, were challenged with the reality that there was a significant borrowing program that had to be undertaken in 2016.

Mr. Speaker, I think I have the dubious honour of going down in the history books as being the Finance Minister who signed the most debt for the people of the province. I can assure you that is not a note in the history books that I'm proud of but it is an example of why fiscal prudence and fiscal responsibility balanced with investments in the communities and investment more importantly in services for the citizens of the province is such an important balance to strike. Mr. Speaker, I think our government has struck that balance this year as we have with the realities that we were challenged with in the last number of years.

Mr. Speaker, the part of the Finance Minister's comments when the budget debate was opened was a recommitment to the fiscal targets that were established two budgets ago. Certainly, those targets are important because as a province we pay the most expensive prices for the debt that we borrow. We've seen borrowing costs rise in our province as a result of our increasing debt from over, I think about \$850 million to well over \$1.1 billion now. That's something that should concern every single Member of this House of Assembly, especially in the context of what is sustainable in the future.

Again, it's great that oil is helping and providing opportunity and room but we certainly want to be aware of those increasing costs. So I was certainly pleased and proud that our government is continuing on track to a target of surplus in 2022.

Mr. Speaker, the other item that I'd like to talk about as well – and it's been referenced by a number of my colleagues, particularly colleagues whose districts in regions of the province are going to benefit from this infrastructure investment – is the work that the government has undertaken in a variety of departments to maximize the opportunity with federal funding, and by ensuring that monies we have available to us as a province are maximized to leverage every single dollar we can get from the federal government.

That's important for two reasons; one is that it allows us to make sure that the infrastructure, whether it's transportation infrastructure, health infrastructure, whether it's educational infrastructure, that those things are in place for the communities and the people of the province that need them.

There's also another really important reason why we do that. When we look at the economic outlook for the province, the focus that this government has placed on jobs and ensuring that we are contributing positively to an environment that's conducive for job creation, infrastructure money is an exceptional way to help bridge that, and make sure that we have an opportunity for these investments to pay off not only in needed infrastructure, but also in the economic activity that's driven from this infrastructure money.

Mr. Speaker, I particularly call out the infrastructure spending under the five-year Roads Plan and, also, the fact that our government has taken a long-term view to investments in making sure that when we make decisions about investments, that we're allowing the people of the province who do this work to bid and focus their efforts on the most responsible costs for government which, more importantly, is the taxpayers.

I think we have a lot of discussion in this House about the budget and government's decision, but really we're stewards of the coffers that really belong to the people of the province. That's why these decisions are taken I'm sure no differently today than they have been in the last number of years with a view to making the decisions that are in the best interests of the people of the province.

Mr. Speaker, the other item from the budget that I'd like to reference and speak to are the income supports. When we brought in our first budget back in 2016, it was a really important part of that budget, an important part by this caucus to have an opportunity to help those individuals in our province who are may be impacted by some of the decisions that we had to make back in 2016. This year, there will be \$121 million invested for income supports.

Mr. Speaker, I think we just need to take a moment and soak on that in the context that that

actually touches 155,000 individuals, which is a significant portion of our population when you know that the population is about 524,000. There are large numbers of our population that are benefiting, and need to benefit, from that program. It's one that our government is very proud of and certainly I was pleased for the role that I was able to play in it.

The other item that I'd like to bring out from my perspective, there was an announcement in this year's budget around the introduction of a Search and Rescue Volunteer Tax Credit. Eligible search and rescue volunteers can claim a \$3,000 non-refundable tax credit from the provincial income tax return starting in January of 2019.

Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege last July of spending some time, I think actually, Mr. Speaker, in your district and also in the district of one of our colleagues on the West Coast. I had the opportunity to tour a facility where there was a very passionate leader of a search and rescue squad in Stephenville. It was very impressive the conversation that he had about the amount of value he could drive from the scarce dollars that he was able to get, and also the incredible work that his team was doing, particularly in a place where we have such a diverse landscape, people in crisis, in need of help in all kinds of different ways.

I remember leaving Stephenville that day, picking up the phone and calling the guys in the tax division and saying put this on your radar. I have to say that when the Minister of Finance stood up, read the budget, and we had our caucus briefings, it was certainly a piece that I took personal pride in, particularly considering that opportunity to speak to that passionate volunteer in Stephenville, whom I'm sure you're familiar with.

Mr. Speaker, I'd also like to just highlight two particular areas in my district that generate a significant number of calls. Most of the issues and inquiries from constituents in the District of Windsor Lake relate primarily to health, health care and education.

Certainly, I was pleased to stand with the government and see the announcement about the move forward on services for those people who

need in-patient care for mental health services. I think it's an important commitment by this government and I was glad to see that was reflected in the budget of this year.

I also wanted to speak briefly about the commitments in this year's budget related to education. There's been a large discussion throughout the number of years that I've been in this House of Assembly around the importance of early childhood development. I very much support government's investments in early learning and early childhood development. We know that there are dozens and dozens and dozens and dozens of studies around the world that say clearly investments in making sure that young children – before the age of five – have the opportunity to receive education that enables them to take full value of the education system that we have from five to 16. There are a lot of studies that says those early years are critical years and that investments pay off in significant dividends in the long run.

Mr. Speaker, while it's often easier to make the investments in a budget for today, or for the short term or for short-term gratification of our constituents, it takes real foresight to be able to make those investments that are critical to the long-term success and you won't see the benefit for many, many years. I think those investments that we're making in early childhood development are certainly ones that will yield a return, and more importantly set our children up for a stronger future because of those investments of today.

Mr. Speaker, I also wanted to acknowledge the Premier's Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes. The group of people who prepared that report and provided it to government, the people who participated in the discussions that fed into the report, have done an amazing amount of work, and ultimately we have some very practical and pragmatic recommendations that, for the most part, there seems to be – at least from what I'm hearing – a significant amount of agreement that those recommendations are important.

This year, government was able to commit \$6.9 million to the actions, recommendations from the Premier's Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes. Mr. Speaker, I think

that's a really important investment, as I said earlier. Short-term gratification in some spending areas may be seen as pragmatic by some. I'm of the belief that we should be thinking about how the long-term sustainability of the province, particularly our young people and their ability to be able to do the jobs of the future that we don't even know exist today is going to be so important, and those investments in our education system certainly will be important.

Mr. Speaker, just for a second I'll go back to health. One of the things I also wanted to call out on health was the investments that the province is making in the – as a result of the bilateral agreement with the federal government – specifically to support mental health and addictions. While I can certainly attest to the amount of work that the Minister of Health has done on that particular file, it was certainly a privilege to sit next to him at one of those meetings as we negotiated some of those numbers. So, congratulations to the minister for being able to bring an investment that is so critical in the area of mental health in our province.

Mr. Speaker, this year's budget I think is a reflection of our desire to make sure that we make the correct short-term decisions, the correct medium-term decisions and also the right long-term decisions. While we can all argue in this House of Assembly whether we've struck that balance perfectly, I learned a long time ago, Mr. Speaker, a great saying that has been posted in many offices that I've been in, that says: Perfection is a destination; excellence is a journey.

By continuing to work and listen and make changes and modify plans, I think we'll continue to see an opportunity for people in the province to be hopeful about the things that government is choosing to support and choosing to prioritize.

Mr. Speaker, it's been a privilege to speak to the budget and I look forward to an opportunity to do it again in the future.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm certainly glad to have an opportunity now for, I guess, the final time now on the main budget motion, to have a few words.

Mr. Speaker, before I do, I guess get into some of the aspects of the budget and so on, I do want to commend my colleagues on both sides of the House who have come forward and brought the issues forward as it relates to, as we know, bullying and harassment and so on. I think it's important. It's a long time coming. I will say it could have happened last year, it could have happened the year before, it could have happened four years before that or ten years before that.

This is not something that is unique to this particular administration or party or anything. It's been going on for way too long. I commend everyone for coming forward, and let's get this dealt with so that we can move forward for the interests of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. I think we all have to reflect – I know I can reflect on my first two years, really, that in terms of antics in the House of Assembly, I was no angel myself, and I'm the first one to admit that. I think that anyone who's around here can reflect on their own actions over the years.

Certainly, we've heard of things coming forward now that's gone to a much greater level, a more serious level. It's important that this get dealt with and that we all – I think there needs to be some work done in terms of democratic reform. I think there needs to be some work done in terms of how we treat each other in the House of Assembly, this whole us and them type of mentality that happens, the unnecessary heckling and bullying and so on that can occur from time to time.

I think we need to examine how we interact with each other, whether it be in a caucus situation or whether it be the relationship between, if it's the government, the relationship between caucus and Cabinet and the need to include Members of caucus in the decision-making process and ensure they're aware of things as opposed to just being told how things are going to be. I know

that's a systemic issue. It has nothing to do with this particular administration but it is the way it has worked, and I think that needs to change. If we can do that, I think we would have much more productive sessions in the House of Assembly to deal with the people's business.

It is somewhat disappointing, really. When you think about it, we were all elected to do the people's business. We know we're in a situation where we have a huge debt in the province. We have a significant deficit again this year. That deficit is going to continue on at least until 2022 according to the government. People will challenge whether we'll even have a surplus then, but let's hope so.

We're told the debt is growing by \$2.3 million a day. We're told, only a year or so ago, that we were at risk of not even being able to make payroll. We have people potentially facing electricity bills in a couple of years' time which are going to be doubled. We have unemployment rates soaring. We have spending down and we have consumer confidence down. While all of this is going on around us, we have to deal with the issue of how we treat each other.

So like I said, let's get on with it. Let's get this done. Let's all commit and work together to change the culture we have so we can deal with important issues such as the deficit, such as the debt that I already alluded to.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of the budget – and I'm not going to be too repetitive here. In terms of the budget, there were some good things in there. I already spoke about it before. It certainly wasn't all negative. If you had to look at this budget on its own, I don't think there would be a whole lot that you could be, perhaps, too upset about. There's not a lot to get really excited about. There are a few good initiatives, I mentioned before. I gave credit where credit was due, but certainly for me, my issue was – the deal-breaker for me in 2016 really was the levy, and until that's gone it will continue to be my deal-breaker.

Beyond that, we all know something had to be done. We all know that to do nothing in 2016 certainly wasn't an option. Again, I think it was just a matter of degrees. That was really all I disagreed with, was the degree to which it was

decided to move forward. A lot of the measures taken still exist today.

Hopefully, we get to a point where we can start managing the expense side of the ledger a little better and take some more action. Hopefully, we can improve revenues through, whether it be aquaculture or agriculture, or – oil revenues will always play a role, of course; mining – and get to a point where we can start to reduce the taxes and fees that were put in place and instill more confidence in the public, put more money in people's pockets so they can start contributing to the economy, so that small business can start hiring more people again and so on. That's really where we need to get.

There is no magic bullet, as I've acknowledged. I think we would all acknowledge there is no magic bullet to this. It's fine to say we're going to diversify the economy, and obviously it's important to do that, but you can't just wave a magic wand and all of a sudden the economy is magically diversified and everyone who wasn't working is just, all of a sudden, everybody's employed and everything is going gangbusters. That's just not realistic.

Government has to create an environment for that to happen. They have to make strategic investments – obviously, and I encourage them to do that – where it makes sense. I would also encourage government to ensure that when we're dealing with our natural resources, that any agreements, any deals that would be made would have to maximize the benefit to the province, not just in terms of royalties, but in terms of sustainable long-term jobs, not just short-term jobs and megaprojects as we've seen in the past.

Obviously, that's where we need to go. We have to make sure that wherever we can we see local people that are employed. We've seen a number of projects here in Newfoundland and Labrador, big projects where we find out that a lot of the people that are gaining the employment are not even from this province. We need to maximize the benefit to local business and to local people. As I said, we have to try to ensure that we create jobs that are going to last for the long term, not the short term, so we're not into this sort of cycle of boom and bust as we've seen in the past.

Mr. Speaker, there are so many things we can talk about, so many industries that we have and opportunities, as I said, whether it be mining, whether it be oil and gas, whether it be agriculture, but one that does not get the attention I believe it deserves is the fishery. Certainly, I have to say – and I'll give credit where it's due – that the Member for Cape St. Francis has raised this issue on numerous occasions about the fishery. It's important that he do so.

We continue to have issues with our fishery. We know that much of the issues that we're experiencing are controlled by the federal government and it's going to require the co-operation of the federal government to fix them. We all know that probably one of the biggest issues is adjacency to our resources and for us to benefit from them. Of course, we know we have the issue with seals. It's another big one that needs to be tackled. Leadership needs to be shown on addressing it.

I think that as a province we need more say and more in management and joint management. There are other things as well, but these are some of the main issues that we hear about that I think we would agree needs to happen. The question is what are we going to do about it?

I realize the Minister of Fisheries – I'm not sure if that's the name of the title; Fisheries is in his portfolio anyway. I know he's had meetings with his counterparts in Ottawa and I encourage him to continue doing that. But at the end of the day, one minister going up and having a meeting or a couple of meetings with the federal minister of Fisheries just isn't going to cut it, and I think we need to get to a point where we all come up with a united front on some core issues that we can all agree that needs to happen to improve the fishery here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I think we all have to work together in a united front to bring that forth to the federal government. I know sometimes people roll their eyes when they hear all-party committee and so on, but the reality of it is that we have had success with all-party committees. We had it on the shrimp allocations, we had it with the All-Party Committee on Mental Health, and all parties worked together and we saw some success with that.

I think when it comes to issues of the fishery in general that we need to employ the same strategy, have all parties involved, have all seven of our MPs involved – hold their feet to the fire. I haven't heard a whole lot, for example, on the issue of the surf clam. I heard one statement, a one-time statement from the MP for the area, but other than that, not a sound – not a sound. We have seven MPs. They're supposed to be representing us. They should be part of that solution; they should be part of that united front.

I'm not just talking about putting together a committee and making a one-time presentation to Ottawa, it has to be a sustained effort. A one-time thing for the cameras is not going to cut it. It might look good, but it's not solving the issue. It has to be a sustained effort. Whether that be the all-party committee, meetings up in Ottawa, engaging our MPs, perhaps initiating a letter-writing, an email campaign to the minister of Fisheries federally, to the prime minister, with the very first letter coming from the Premier of our province. Whether it be holding rallies and so on, with the very first speaker being the Premier of our province at those rallies, engaging people in the fisheries. And to continue it, speaking to other groups up along and so on, the Premier, to bring our issues forward, to state our case to Canada. That's what we need to do and it has to be a sustained effort.

To simply stand up here and say, oh yeah, we support the fishery – we've had that before. We've had these PMRs, private Members' resolutions, we all stood up and said, yeah, we all support the fishery, and we all gave ourselves, I believe, a standing ovation, we all clapped and that was the end of it. Not a sound about it after – not a sound.

So we need to do more when it comes to fighting for our fishery. I encourage the Premier to lead the charge in that regard, and to the Leaders of the Official Opposition and the Third Party, which I'm sure they would be on board for such an initiative.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to take a couple of minutes to talk about the announcement that was made as it relates to a partnership with Quebec on mining, on some transportation and mining interests and so on. I know when that was announced, without a doubt, I heard it from

some people, I know we all heard it from people I'm sure about the concern about the boogeyman: Quebec. But I wanted to say that I do support the government on that initiative and I really believe that the time has come to bury the hatchet, so to speak. We can't live in the past.

We all know we felt hard done by. Everybody knows what happened with the Upper Churchill; we all know that. I don't have all the history on the circumstances, whether it was we went into it with our eyes wide open, whether our hands were forced, whether we were coerced, I don't know. The bottom line is we got the dirty end of the stick on that particular deal. We all know that. Anyone who's a Newfoundlander and Labradorian, I think for the most part, we feel hard done by. I get it. We all get it. But there comes a point in time where we have to look at what's in the best interest of our province now.

Now, that doesn't mean selling the shop or selling off assets, because I have concerns about that which I'll talk about later, if I get time, with the division of Nalcor; that's a different issue altogether. If we can make agreements on infrastructure, roads, mining agreements and so on and it benefits both provinces, then I can't see why we would not engage in those negotiations.

I'm sure we have intelligent Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who are more than capable of sitting down and negotiating a fair deal for us. As long as that can happen and as long as there is public scrutiny and so on and it's done in an open and transparent manner and as long as it makes sense for us and it's to our benefit, then I don't think we should shy away from doing that with any province, including Quebec.

So I say to the government, proceed with caution but certainly proceed. We can no longer just say because of what happened before we're not going to have anything to do with you. It makes no sense – no sense whatsoever.

Now, in terms of the division of Nalcor; that was something that was in the budget document, obviously. It was sort of a highlight, a bit of a surprise, and I do have some concerns on that one. I do question the Minister of Natural Resources who said that by dividing the oil and

gas from the hydro side, we're going to place more focus – I think were her words – on oil and gas development and so on.

I think we all support trying to expedite activity. Creating more activity in our offshore because of the obvious benefit of royalties, jobs and so on. We all I think would support that principle. I'm not sure how simply changing the nameplate over the door or moving the office, or renaming a division, or creating a new Crown corporation, I'm not sure how that makes it more focused to be honest with you.

I would assume the people in that division of Nalcor now are focused. I hope they're focused because diversely, if you're saying we're doing it so they will be focused, to look at that you'd say: are you saying they're not focused now? They should be focused. That's their job. They're getting paid well to be focused. So I question that argument.

I also question how it's going to be cost neutral. Because if you're going to potentially – and I don't have all the details, I'll readily admit that. If you're going to set up a new corporation, another board of directors, you're going to have to change the – I'm not sure if they're moving location or not, but you're going to have to – potentially, there's going to be moving, there's going to be advertising, there's going to be new websites, letterheads, all this kind of stuff and rearranging staff. They say there's no cost to that. I find that one kind of difficult to believe there would be no cost, but we'll wait and see I guess.

The bigger concern I have, and this is something that – and I'm not saying this is the case because I don't know. Quite frankly, I don't know what negotiations are going on behind closed doors and what the minister is negotiating and who they're talking to, or who the Premier is talking to, but I do have a concern. I'll be honest, I have a concern, rightly or wrongly, that I would not want to see this as an attempt to separate the hydro side from the oil and gas side because we're planning on perhaps ridding ourselves of assets, doing a fire sale on assets, or entering into some kind of an agreement with Emera, or with Fortis, or Hydro-Québec that is going on that we're not aware of that would not be in our best interest.

I have a concern, now that may be wrong. Maybe there's nothing going on and the reason for doing it is simply the reason that was given, to put focus on oil and gas. I have to be honest – I'm going to just say it for the record, and I hope I'm wrong – I'm concerned that there are other implications and there's something else on the go as it relates to our hydro assets. I'm concerned we're going to end up getting the dirty end of that deal, if such a deal exists or is being contemplated. I'll certainly be keeping an eye on it, as I'm sure all Members will, but it is something that I have a concern about.

I can see I'm starting to run out of time, so I'll end on a couple of positive notes.

The government did indicate recently they were going to be looking at introducing more technology for service delivery and so on. There was a name on it. I can't remember what it was called but it was a technology initiative announced a couple of weeks ago. I do support that. Obviously, we'd have to see the details. The devil is always in the details, but anywhere we can utilize technology to create more efficiency and so on in delivery of government services, I think we should do that.

Bearing in mind, not everybody is technologically savvy, not everyone has access necessarily to computers or so on. We have to bear in mind seniors and stuff like that, but utilizing technology, to my mind, is a positive thing and I encourage the government to go down that road as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BYRNE: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Allow me to pick up where the hon. Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands left off. He began speaking about the digital age and the importance of the digital presence that we have within government. I cannot think of a more relevant and important topic, as we advance our economy, as we advance our province and we

advance the level of services that are available to each and every one of us.

I am so proud that our government is putting forward, as part of our *Way Forward*, a Digital by Design for the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BYRNE: There are so many elements in our budget, Mr. Speaker.

As Members, we all can speak to specific and individual initiatives, things that affect our constituencies, things that affect the broad province. We also have to recognize there are elements of this budget that, while not necessarily stated out loud or stated often, are crucially important; very, very important to the success of our province, of our people and to our economy and to our social state.

That is why Digital by Design, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, as part of our *Way Forward*, we have targeted an initiative to ensure that government services are available. We actually highlight the fact that there is one client, one Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and one relationship between our citizens, our constituents and interacting with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

So many services, Mr. Speaker, are currently being taken advantage of and provided for through a web-based portal, whether it be renewal of licences, various permits and forms, whether it be just finding information on things such as job searches or programs and services that may be available and, indeed, moose licences.

Moose licences, big game licences, of course, one of the most popular draws to our government website. I can report to you, Mr. Speaker, that we have – in record time, as a result of the adaptation of new technology – been able to bring forward the quickest, the earliest moose big game licence draw in the history of the licence big game hunt in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BYRNE: As of today, May 1, we have completed a draw and we are now beginning to notify successful applicants to their big game applications. That, Mr. Speaker, is a perfect example of how digital technology, Digital by Design and the Office of the Chief Information Officer, and the budget that we provide for the Office of the Chief Information Officer is so, so critical, so important to the good operations of government.

Mr. Speaker, all through our budget you will find core examples of this kind of initiative. Things that you may not necessarily hear on a street corner or necessarily read in a newspaper, but these are crucial elements to providing good government, to providing great services and making sure that we are ready for the 21st century. Our government, Mr. Speaker, is well ahead of that game.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BYRNE: Now, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to talk a little bit about how the budget and previous budgets affect the great and historic District of Corner Brook of Western Newfoundland, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

I highlight the fact that when we took government, when we took office, I remember the day very, very well. We recognized and we realized what a significant budget deficit, accumulated debt and a downward spiral we were in, but our government refused, we absolutely refused to just accept the premise that government should stand still. We not only dealt with the deficit, we are currently still dealing with the deficit but we are on track, Mr. Speaker.

While we took on this enormous task, this enormous responsibility, we also recognized we had to maintain core services. That's why I can report to this House, as I have done earlier, that while others said it could never be done in that fiscal era, while others said it was irresponsible to do in this fiscal era, while others said it just won't be done, our government decided to forge ahead.

After 10 years of broken promises on the West Coast Western Memorial Regional Hospital

rebuild, our government said it must be done. That project was first announced in 2007. Why was it announced in 2007? Because it was recognized back then that the hospital was in a state of decay that needed to be replaced and that patient services, health care services in Western Newfoundland and throughout the entire Western, Southwestern, Northern, Central Newfoundland and Southern Labrador would be negatively impacted if it was not replaced.

That's why in 2007, Mr. Speaker, there was a decision taken by a former government that recognized it had to be replaced. What did they do? They budgeted at that point in time \$135 million for a brand new hospital. They just didn't tell anyone that it was only \$135 million.

After 10 years of constant, regular, consistent promises being made and promises being broken, we finally got to the point in 2015, without any information being provided to the public, the government withdrew the entire fiscal framework for the future construction of the hospital. Then, in January 2016, when our new government had taken office and we began to explore what we expected to be a fully planned and a reasonably financed project with the fiscal framework reflecting the money for the hospital, we assumed that would be in place and we could simply carry on and get the job done.

What we discovered, there was no final plan and all money related to the Western Memorial Regional Hospital rebuild was removed from the fiscal framework. Then we heard from the now-leader of the Opposition – or no, sorry, the former leader of the Opposition that in January of 2016 he publicly stated to the people of Western Newfoundland: The hospital should never be built because it was irresponsible to do so in this particular time frame. *The Western Star* story of that records that conversation very well.

Mr. Speaker, we did not take defeat. We did not take the negativity. We did not take the naysayers who promoted the concept of abandoning health care and the people of Western Newfoundland, Northern Newfoundland, Southwestern Newfoundland, Southern Labrador and Central Newfoundland;

we decided to forge a new way to get the job done.

Today, we have not only accomplished that important task but we are now in the midst of constructing a long-term care facility in Corner Brook, we are in the midst of planning and constructing long-term care facilities in Grand Falls-Windsor, in Gander and, importantly in this budget, through the leadership not only of our Premier, of our Finance Minister, but of our Minister of Health and Community Services, the replacement for the Waterford is very much on track and will be completed.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BYRNE: Now that, Mr. Speaker, is leadership.

Over the course of the last number of years in our collective short tenures in this place in this particular parliamentary session, I have been truly amazed to hear some of the comments about important initiatives for the province that would be based out of Western Newfoundland that have met with such negativity by the Opposition Parties.

That included, of course, not only the long-term care facility, but the new hospital for Western Newfoundland. It also included the relocation of the headquarters of Crown Lands to where our agricultural headquarters is, where our forestry headquarters is, and where we are creating the greatest synergies from that move. Creating synergies from within a lands department where instead of having three separate geographic information system units, three separate mapping units, three land planning use units, we now have synergies that are created because forestry, Mr. Speaker, as a land-tenured industry and sector obviously would require land planning tools.

Agriculture, being a land-tenured industrial sector would require land planning tools. And of course, Crown Lands, being a land-tenured service would require land planning and mapping tools. Well, each and every one of those divisions had separate units. What we did, Mr. Speaker, is we brought those together and created greater efficiencies and better results. Now what was the reaction for that innovation?

It should not be located on the West Coast. It's irresponsible to do that, was the reaction from the Members opposite.

Well, Mr. Speaker, the people of Corner Brook and Western Newfoundland remember that very, very well. And I think they will continue to remember that reaction very well, because the move of Crown Lands, the headquarters, to where also the headquarters of forestry and agriculture is, has been very, very effective. In fact, Mr. Speaker, while Crown Lands had vacancies of upwards of 40 per cent in some regional offices – because, of course, as you know we have Crown Lands counter service regional service desks in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, in Corner Brook, Grand Falls-Windsor, Gander, Clarenville and St. John's. None of those services were affected. Those front-line services weren't affected at all.

One of the interesting things, Mr. Speaker, that many people may not be aware of is that there were upwards of 40 per cent staffing vacancies in those regional offices, in those front-line services which led to a backlog of upwards of 3,000 unprocessed land applications – 3,000 – some being on file and unprocessed for upwards of 10 years. That was simply unacceptable.

Of course, with our new portal by our Digital by Design, we'll be able to greater integrate not only as a planning tool, but an application tool using online platforms being able to apply for Crown lands online. That process is already well underway and up and running. People are already using it very successfully, Mr. Speaker.

What the issue here was that we had a backlog of 3,000 applications. I could report to this House, through you, Mr. Speaker, that in the very, very near future that entire backlog will be completed and processed and we will move to new applications exclusively. People are already feeling the power and the benefit of that particular initiative, that leadership to get to recognize: (a) the problem, but also (b) act on the problem. That's what produces results.

Mr. Speaker, I have to say to you one of the most confounding words that I've ever heard spoken on the floor of the House of Assembly was that I heard just the other day my hon. critic, my friend, the Member for Mount Pearl North,

suggest that agriculture should be prioritized exclusively on the East Coast because that's where the people are.

AN HON. MEMBER: What?

MR. BYRNE: Agriculture should be prioritized exclusively on the East Coast of the province because that's where the people are.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, *Hansard* will reflect those words. That's a précis of them but those who are interested – I know I am and I know the people of Western Newfoundland are very interested in those words. We'll probably hear those words again.

AN HON. MEMBER: And Central too.

MR. BYRNE: And Central as well. I almost want to apologize for the Member because it was very telling that there's such a bias. We are all one province. We have agricultural opportunities in Labrador, Mr. Speaker. We have huge agricultural opportunities in Labrador. We, as a government, our government intend to develop those opportunities in Labrador. We do not feel any need, necessity or value in denigrating another area for the benefit of raising up another area.

We also recognize there are huge opportunities in agriculture in Central Newfoundland and we are going to develop those through such innovations. Working as a provincial industry, we have redesigned the Wooddale forestry centre and turned it into the Centre for Forest Science and Innovation. We have included, in Central Newfoundland, a major, major innovation hub where innovation in agriculture, in crop techniques and other important innovation that can advance our agricultural industry can be developed in partnership not only with Memorial University faculty, staff and facilities in St. John's, but with Grenfell Campus of Memorial University in Corner Brook.

We obviously view the agricultural industry very differently than what the Opposition Members do. We don't view it as being something to the exclusion of all others. We view it as being a provincial industry and we recognize there are key strengths of the agricultural community in Eastern

Newfoundland, in the Avalon and, in particular, in the Northeast Avalon, but we are not afraid to recognize that there are huge potentials as well in Labrador, in Central Newfoundland and on the West Coast of Newfoundland because that's exactly where some of the most significant growth will obviously occur on a land-tenured industry.

We have 64,000 hectares of identified agricultural land that are available for new entrants and existing and incumbent entrants into the farming sector into the agrifoods industry. Mr. Speaker, we intend to develop as much of that land as there is demand for. And by increasing that demand – how do we help increase that demand? Well, our budget maps that out. We have been able to successfully negotiate with our federal partners a Canadian Agricultural Partnership agreement. That new agreement provides substantial funding. It is somewhat based on previous agreements.

This is an agreement that the Minister of Transportation and Works will well understand and well know of because he was critically important in negotiating with the federal government and showed not only leadership for Newfoundland and Labrador on this, but he helped mould and shape the Canadian Agricultural Partnership agreement for the benefit of every province in Canada and was heralded with great applause by his counterparts at the meetings in St. John's, Newfoundland in 2017 when he did so.

The result, the benefits of that particular agreement will be seen in land development, in innovation, in new technologies and growing our agricultural sector because we have a very deliberate strategy that we want to double our food production in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Now, will we stop there? No, we won't. We recognize the challenges are great. We currently only grow 10 per cent of our food. We need to double that to 20 per cent. Is that to be the final target? Absolutely, not, Mr. Speaker, but what we recognize, and Statistics Canada tell us well, that the number of family farms in Newfoundland and Labrador declined substantially. Between 2004 and 2015, we saw over a 30 per cent drop in the number of farms

in Newfoundland and Labrador, active farms, and our objective is to reverse that trend.

That's where getting new entrants into the industry is going to be so important, but as well supporting incumbents. The key and the focus here is going to be on food production, making sure that Newfoundland and Labrador's food security is safeguarded, it's advanced and that we always recognize we can do even more.

That's why we're working with Food First NL to reach those goals. We have many, many partners to be able to accomplish this but our greatest partner is our collective imaginations. That's where we have been able to develop this strategy which will make such a big, big difference.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the best time to finish a speech is when you still have time left, so I will take my place now to allow someone else to provide this House with perspective, directive and a challenge: How can we do any better than that? I appreciate it very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Warr): The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

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

I'm happy to stand here and speak to *Budget 2018* and as always, the Member for Corner Brook is tough act to follow, but I'll try my best.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. A. PARSONS: It's hard to hear with – the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands certainly enjoyed the speech from the Member for Corner Brook. I'm glad to see that because he had a lot of good things to say.

I'm happy. This is my first opportunity to speak to *Budget 2018*. I'm very happy to speak to this. The first thing I'd like to do is provide a thank you to not only the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, but all the staff that he has around him. I've always said that any good work that's done by a department is a team

effort. I know the work that goes into preparing a budget. There is a lot of staff, a lot of hours. To the minister: I commend him and thank him and thank his staff for everything they've done.

I think what's been put forward is certainly a very balanced approach to a situation that we find ourselves in. Budgeting is tough. You ask any Newfoundlander and Labradorian, budgeting tough is at the best of times. When you look at, as a government, dealing with people's money and trying to provide services that they've come to expect, come to rely on and have been doing it in challenging fiscal times when the till has been cleaned out, when it's been left empty, that makes it even tougher. That's what we've been forced to deal with.

What I will say is that I know the budget must not be too offensive to the other side because they spent more time talking about the 2016 budget. It seems like most of the commentary they've put forward has been the budget of 2016, which is fine and dandy. That was certainly a tough year. You come in; you're very new to the government, to budgeting. Especially new when you find out that the situation that you thought was there was not there, that the information the government of the time was putting out was misrepresented. The situation was bad but not as bad as it really – we all knew it was bad but nobody had any idea it was that bad.

I think what that says is that when the Opposition finds it tough to complain about the budget, that says it's hard to find fault with the budget. When they talk about other things, I say that's obviously a positive thing. That's how I look at this particular exercise.

The Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands has I think provided a balanced commentary on the budget. I think he's spoken his mind on strengths and weaknesses. To that, I expected it. The former leader of the NDP has spoken. Her commentary earlier today was that she was shocked by the budget. I've been through seven budgets and she's been shocked by every one. At some point, you just wonder if the shock is real or if it's just the same manufactured line. This is not a shock. Again, most of the commentary went back to 2016.

We all represent the same people, Mr. Speaker. We all want to do good by them, we want to do well by them and we want to invest and spend their money in their best interests. I think the efforts we've put forward through our entire caucus, through the submissions that were put forward, I think, were positive.

I'd like to think this was a team effort and I'm going to give you one reason why just right off the top. This is not driven solely by a Premier or by a Minister of Finance or by a Cabinet, by a caucus, it's a team effort.

I was lucky to go to an announcement recently out in the Town of Paradise about the Volunteer Tax Credit for search and rescue members. Joining us at that was the Member for Stephenville – I forget the full district name now.

AN HON. MEMBER: Stephenville - Port au Port.

MR. A. PARSONS: Stephenville - Port au Port who is an excellent contributing Member of this team. He was recognized by the Minister of Finance that he brought that idea forward. He did it by meeting with the volunteers in his community.

I've been lucky. I know the Member for Windsor Lake referenced search and rescue – I think it was today – talking about she had been out there on that side of the province and had met with this group, very passionate. I also had that same experience and I met with this group, met with these individuals. The way they can squeeze things out of a dollar is absolutely amazing. They are so good with the money they get.

By listening, this Member for Stephenville - Port au Port has provided benefit, but not only for his own district, for all of our districts, for all of the volunteers.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. A. PARSONS: That is an example of listening. It's a great idea. I can't say enough good about things we can do for our first responders, whether it's our volunteer firefighters, whether it's search and rescue.

When I spoke that day I had just a chance to speak very quickly and I talked about the fact that in my own district, search and rescue that very night before had rescued a gentleman from my area that had been missing for two days, an elderly gentleman. They came through.

I was just really happy to be able to speak that day, to thank them for their service. I'm just talking about one example of how it really is a team effort in making these budgets work and making sure we get things out that benefit all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

I'd like to speak with sort of two hats on really. Firstly, there's the Justice side of things where being the Minister of Justice and Public Safety and the Attorney General, I can talk about some of the wonderful investments we've made in Justice. I'd also like to speak as the Member for Burgeo - La Poile which is probably what I'm most proud of.

I always say to people, the fact that the Premier has given me this role and doing the job that I absolutely love is excellent. I love it, and I appreciate every single day that I get to wake up and come into work and work with all the people in that department. But I only get to do that work by virtue of the people of Burgeo - La Poile giving me that opportunity. Home is where the heart is, and you never forget where you came from. Those people have given me that chance.

I'm going to speak about how I think there have been a lot of steps taken, especially in the last couple of years, about making things better for the people of Burgeo - La Poile. I have a lot of thanks to give out to a lot of departments, to a lot of ministers, to a lot of my friends in caucus and to people within these departments that are actually doing the work.

Speaking about Justice, firstly, the problem sometimes with Justice is that the announcements sometimes cannot be as – I hate to use the word “positive,” but they're things that many people don't ever have to deal with. I'll give an example. One big thing we've invested in is the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. Most people may go through their daily lives or their entire life with never having an interaction with the chief medical examiner's office. It's not something you want to because

when they're involved, that means there's been a death.

A couple of years ago when we came in, perhaps one of the first issues I had to deal with was a prosecution that did not happen because of a loss of evidence, very serious where there was evidence – and everybody knows what I'm talking about, where there was an accused murder, an alleged murder, it was being tried. Either way, some of the primary evidence was lost. When you hear from the family that's going through this, it's one thing to lose your loved one, to lose a child. I can't put myself in the same position; I can only emphaticize and think about how traumatic that is.

To then get the second – the part where you go through that, but there's no responsibility in your eyes in the courts, and that came down to some issues that were identified in the chief medical examiner's office. The first thing I want to point out is the people that work there are fantastic, they're amazing. They do work that is truly important to not only the administration of justice, but to people's well-being, especially in terms of understanding what has happened, what has gone on. We need that.

What I can say is that office, through no fault of the staff there, was ignored. It was ignored by the previous administration. They knew the concerns were there. When I'm the only minister that's been there in decades, that just tells you – again, they wouldn't be able to tell you where the office is let alone how it operates.

What we've done this year is we have invested in that office by virtue of a report that we had commissioned from the office in Nova Scotia. What that's going to do is that's going to lead to us taking steps that are necessary to avoid the situation that put us here.

No one wants to see a matter not go through justice because of something like that that can be avoided. So we've done a lot of work in the last two years to make that happen, and we made the case going through the budgeting process. Again, it's not the same when you're talking about – it's very easy to talk about – I always compare it to seeing a physical injury versus a non-physical or a mental illness.

That was always the big thing. You could see the broken leg, you can see the stitches, you can see the cut, you can see the bone; but, mental illness, one of the issues always has been you can't see it. So it's hard to grasp it.

Well, it's the same thing in many cases like this where people find it very easy to justify the need for a new hospital, a new school. These are things that fall into those top areas that are always identified as primary concerns for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

The chief medical examiner would not necessarily be there, but we've made an investment and it's one that's necessary. It's going to bring our office – again, we've only gotten this far because of the staff that work there. Now we're doing to do more to increase that staff and to make that office better than what it was, just by the virtue of giving them the resourcing they absolutely need.

Another step we've taken is the allocation of monies this year to allow for the creation of a Serious Incident Response Team. This is something we've been talking about for some time. Before the Dunphy inquiry was initiated, it was our party, it was our team that talked about independent oversight of police.

Since my time in the department, I've had a chance to work with police, to work with independent oversight individuals from all over this country to provide a service for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians so that their belief in policing will remain and will remain strong. Because when that perception is gone, when that belief is gone, when that trust is gone, it's very hard to re-establish.

We all know we have some of the greatest men and women in this province working in law enforcement. We're very lucky, but to investigate your own is often taken as less than credible. We brought in the legislation last year, we have the funding set aside and we'll continue to work to make this happen. It's another step in the right direction to providing public faith in the administration of justice.

Now, I'm going to switch – I'll have an opportunity to speak about justice again at further points during this debate, but what I do

want to speak about is the District of Burgeo - La Poile. I want to talk about the big change that's happened in the last couple of years.

I got to say this. You're not always going to get what you want. Every district has needs, has wants, has desires that are simply not able to be met. We all know that when you look at the demand that's for different funding, it's always greater than the amount that's there.

What I've really noticed is the fact that my colleagues have taken the time to talk to people in the district, to visit people in the district, to look at the roads, to talk to the employees, to travel on the ferry system, to visit the park, to go to the schools, to just show they care. These people, they have lots to do. They have plenty to do. It's a very big province. But when they take the time to come out and at least talk to the people, it shows an absolute concern for their well-being.

I give you one example, the Burgeo road, for years, Route 480 was known as a very treacherous road. And in many cases it was. I spoke about, a couple years ago, the road literally collapsed. A Transportation and Works employee had a bad accident – came very close to perishing, and thankfully they lived.

A further report showed that there were hundreds of culverts that needed to be replaced immediately. If not, you would have a similar accident. In fact, a year later, we had another one happen. What I can say is that the ministers of Transportation that I've dealt with in my time here have both visited the area, have talked to people, have travelled that road, as opposed to a previous administration that not only did they not come out, when the road was discussed by civil servants as how it needed to be fixed, they said no. When their own employees were facing the possibility of injury, they said no.

So I tell you, I certainly don't want to hear any comments out of the PC Party when it comes to politics in pavement. Because I tell you what, they put lives in danger when it came to infrastructure. That's what they did. They knew; they were aware. I said it a million times. It's one thing about just not being able to do it; they took it off the list and were negligent.

Now, it is one thing to take it off the list, but they showed so little concern. But the fact that my colleagues have taken the time to come out and look – and I'm happy to say to my residents that travel that road, and to everybody's residents, when people go down to visit one of the most beautiful parks in this province, one of the most beautiful beaches in this district, a wonderful tourist area – we all travel that road. It's not just the residents of that area; it's residents from all over. It's our family, it's loved ones and it's people working in business, you name it. That road now, due to the investment that's been made in the last budget, the budget before and especially this budget, will be a safer road and one that people can travel without fear that it will literally collapse beneath their car. That just goes to show the compassion that's applied by my colleagues here on this side of the House.

This is something that I'm very passionate about. I brought this up on a number of occasions with previous ministers, ministers that like to stand up and talk about politics in pavement and like to talk about these things. They knew what they were doing. They chose to do nothing. They chose to do less than nothing. They chose to not only do nothing, but to take it off the list. It really upsets me when the holier-than-thou card is played. That really hurts me.

What I will say is that I'm very thankful that – and, again, the workers that are doing this job travelling this road, I'm really happy to see they've been out there. That's just one investment I'd like to talk about. When I see our communities having work done to their water systems, you look at it, it's absolutely amazing the work that's been done when we talk about our municipalities. We have 276, I think, municipalities; we have 174, I think, unincorporated areas. That's a lot of communities spread out over this province. All have very similar needs in many cases.

It was only three years ago, the last time before we came in, our district – which has very substantial needs in a lot of community's aging infrastructure. We got from the previous minister of Municipal Affairs, the former Member for Mount Pearl North, the grand total for capital works, his last year, was zero dollars – zero, not a cent put into any work.

I'm glad to see that's changed now and there is work being done to water systems for people within the district. I know that we're all saying the same thing. In fact, not only that, I think the greatest thing that's been done is a willingness to work with our federal partners to leverage provincial money to get federal money so that more work can be done in all of our districts across the province.

We all have significant needs and those needs aren't going away, but I'm glad to see that we're working with our federal partners. You'll see that collaboration across the board here, whether it's Infrastructure ministers, whether it's Justice ministers, whether it's ministers of Health. There's an actual working relationship.

I heard a comment from a Member opposite – I think it was today – talking about not willing to stand up to the people in Ottawa. We all saw that. The last crowd, the last image they saw of the previous prime minister was up dancing on the stage and we saw how that went. We saw how that went, right?

Not only that, they couldn't stand up to him. They couldn't get in a room with him. They couldn't talk to him. What we do on this side is we work with them. It's like family sometimes, you're going to have disagreements, you're going to have heated conversations but, at the same time, you have to put forward what's right. We've done that and we're going to continue to do that. We're not always going to agree. Of course we're not. But we'd like to think that as in not just that relationship but even the relationship we have within the Department of Justice, which maybe gives me one last thing to talk about, our sexual assault, violence protocol now where we're talking about providing legal support for those victims of sexual assault, that comes through a collaboration with the federal government and with our partners within the community.

People like Nicole Kieley, people like Kevin O'Shea, people within the department who are making this work through partnerships with everybody. You don't get anywhere by arguing with everybody around you. You get everywhere by working with your partners, working through issues and at the end of the day everybody is able to win.

I'd like to think with the budget that we have here that's put forward a lot of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are going to win as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Trimper): The hon. the Member for Gander and the Minister for Health and Community Services.

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

It's a pleasure again to rise, albeit at the late end of the day, to speak on the budget. I have spoken earlier and that time allocation I used it to talk about the work of the department, and I did say that I hoped to have further opportunities and this is one of them. My intention today is to try and strike a balance between my own district, the beautiful District of Gander and also some comments more generally around the budget.

It's interesting in terms of comments around investment. One of the most highly valued schools in the province, according to the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, a real gem, something that he regarded after a visit there as a model for K-12 schools everywhere, resides in my district. It's close to my heart because that's where my three daughters went to school and graduated, and that's Lakewood Academy in Glenwood. It serves the two communities of Glenwood and Appleton.

They have there an excellent teaching staff, one of whom, in actual fact, arrived the same year that my family moved to Appleton and he took on the role of special needs teacher. That was relevant for me personally because my eldest daughter is hearing impaired and so we forged a relationship professionally and then became friends afterwards. He's been almost militant in his approach to inclusion within the school and to, what he called, empowerment, which from my mental health hat I would talk about resilience for young children and for youth.

As part of our regular process in the department, we have the difficult task of administrating the community mental health grants. We are

challenged every year with a fairly small pot. This year we put in an extra \$10,000 to make it \$150,000 in all, but we have so many applicants that it really becomes quite painful for staff and ourselves to make decisions as to who cannot be funded this particular year.

There are strict eligibility criteria and the like. I won't go into detail because they're all available on the website, but suffice it to say that there was an application from Lakewood which passed the sniff test and staff rated very highly. With this small amount of money, because they are small amounts of money, it's an example of what volunteerism and what commitment from members of the community can do to magnify that sum.

My colleague here talked about very arithmetical process of leveraging federal dollars, 30 cent dollars we pay and we get the full 100 cents from the province. This is, if you like, kind of like sweat or emotional equity from those folk who are committed to bringing these projects to fruition.

It was a week-long empowerment week at Lakewood Academy. I was lucky enough to go to the grand finale when home in my district last Friday.

Using this money, Mr. Bradbury had energized, basically, the entire school. The school band, which is far better than any school band I recall when I was in high school. This one not only plays in tune but is actually pleasing to listen to, and the enthusiasm of the staff there. The place actually almost exudes it. You can feel almost an ambiance when you walk in through the door.

They had the entire school in there. They entertained the K to three with the iPads and colouring. They had gotten two speakers, and this was what the money had been used for, was in part to bring in one of the members of *Dragons' Den* from Toronto, Michael Wekerle, who is a very colourful character whose jacket, I have to say, I did admire only to find out later it was way outside my price limit; and a fellow called Rob Steele, who is a Gander native who moved away and has made a name for himself as an entrepreneur and a businessman in Halifax and has extensive connections still to Newfoundland and Labrador. In actual fact, he,

Bill Bradbury and Wekerle all had connections from their student days. I think that's how they got together.

It was an amazing double act. It really was. For two hours they entertained, brought the youth and the children to the front and had a really exciting and stimulating afternoon. The children were beaming throughout, there was no bored shuffling from the kids and they were really engaged in it. I take my hats off to them. They did a grand job.

I speak about this to show the value outside of the mere dollars and cents that community work – and we've had Volunteer Week very recently as well – brings. The enjoyable part of the job that we have as MHAs is to be able to go out into our districts and be participants, in a very minor way, in showcasing other people's hard work and efforts.

I hope, travel permitting, to be back in Lakewood Academy for their graduation on Friday of this week when, I think, the graduating class this year will be 23. They have had an increase in enrolment and the school is prospering because of the enthusiasm and the interest of the staff.

I highlight that as really district activity, a sign of the commitment of the people in the community to make the next generation more resilient and healthier than the current generation, but also to show that a little bit of pump-priming money often goes a long way. I would draw people's attention to that and just highlight it for the record as much as anything else.

Gander itself is a community that has grown. It is the largest of the communities within my five-community district. I have a very confined geographical district for what is actually a rural district. I can drive from one side to the other of it in – on one road in just under the hour. Gander is the population hub. It's the service hub for the area and has seen growth between the 2011 and 2016 census of quite significant proportions. This is due to economic activity within the area.

The principle employer, at one time, was the base, and fairly consistently has been the airport which, in actual fact, was the town's raison

d'être. It was built there for a very specific reason at the beginnings of transatlantic travel. Indeed, its role in the development of transatlantic aviation, both during the Second World War and the strains and stresses of that, but in the 20 years that succeeded it, it was pivotal in making it safe, viable and economic.

It still has the area control centre for the western Atlantic, which runs down as far as the Caribbean and across to meet the area controlled by Azores. It's a huge area. Well over 300,000 aircraft, for example, will list Gander as an emergency alternate airfield for their transatlantic flights any given year. The number of aircraft that put wheels down is actually very infrequent but it's there. It was called the Crossroads of the World. It's also been called the lifeboat of the Atlantic for that reason.

It's interesting, there were comments made earlier on about how measures proposed by the Opposition Party were very much focused on the Avalon. Unfortunately, I have been surprised by folk in the business community who seem to regard Newfoundland, or the Island of Newfoundland as being the Avalon and not much else. This is for people who actually live here. I actually had something of a debate with a lobbyist from the Atlantic Canada Aerospace & Defence Association who maintained that until the economy turned round everyone should move to the Avalon, fort up and wait for better times. We obviously agree to differ on that. We didn't see eye to eye in the slightest.

The investment in the district that has been made and is proposed for the coming year by this government has been significant. We finally completed the negotiations with the municipality and the federal government, and put up a significant proportion of funding for the much needed waste water treatment plant in Gander. This was constraining growth of the town and has caused many amusing comments about odour problems on the north side of Gander, but because of geographical constraints, it was operating at full capacity and, in actual fact, on some occasions was probably exceeding it.

So in terms of allowing the community to develop still further and unleash it's better, bigger potential, the waste water plant was a key piece of municipal infrastructure. As alluded to

by my colleague from Corner Brook, we are all well along with the process of long-term care beds for both Gander and Grand Falls, and Botwood. The Gander-Grand Falls piece, according to my staff, we are in a position to clue up the qualifying round of the request for qualifications in the near future, and then move ahead with that.

There was a new school opened last year and that has been a huge asset to the community. There are plans, and we have put into the budget money to renovate/rebuild what is Gander Academy, the K-3 school. It was K-6, but because of the increase in population and the increase in number of children enrolled, there was a great benefit to splitting the school into a K-3 and the new elementary school. So we'll, hopefully, be in a position with my colleagues from Transportation and Works and Education and Early Childhood Development to make some announcements about that in the very near future.

I'm hopeful that there will be further investment from Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation for possibly some leverage projects, and I've been working closely with the Chamber on those too.

So, conscious of the time and the fact it is getting late, I'll switch tack a little bit, really, and move from the specifics of my district to some of the suggestions in commentary made about the budget in general. My colleague here laid out the point that really the bulk of the commentary around the budget from the Opposition seats has really been back to the budget of 2016, and I think it's an interesting commentary that they have really just picked and nibbled away at this budget in a very haphazard, ill-thought and rather reprehensible fashion.

Essentially, the comments are made from one, for example, about the levy – again, back to 2016. That goes this year. It's in statute. There's no budgetary decision needed to be made about that; it goes. Comments were made about how our budget has increased and our expenditure has increased. Those have been one-off issues related to circumstances outside our control. Some of them have been, or the appearance is there because of federal dollars that come in that

show up simply as expenditure rather than revenue. I think there is a little bit more thought required before simply turning around and pointing the finger that expenditure has gone up. Looping back to my own department, which went through the Estimates process last night, I was at pains there to point out that the departmental expenditure has remained static at the \$3 billion mark albeit, but static for the three budgets that this government has delivered.

The comments about cuts and not paying off the debt is an interesting one, given the fiscal situation that we're in. Certainly, with my own department, it is very challenging because the comment around cuts is automatically taken to mean a reduction or elimination of services or sites of service.

The money that has been saved within Health – and there are significant quantities of money – has been repurposed. It has been repurposed within Health. It has been used to finance and relieve the pressures, for example, on our drug budget, for these new very expensive drugs. Eight new medications for cancer and non-cancer treatments that have come in to the formulary this year are totalling \$7.5 million – \$7.5 million for eight medications. They are not cheap.

AN HON. MEMBER: That's significant.

MR. HAGGIE: That's significant. That expense was covered by good financial husbandry and savings from within our existing budget. We did not go out to Treasury Board and say: Gimme, write me a cheque. We dealt with the issue ourselves in the department and we covered the expenditure.

Comments were made, for example, last night: What drugs are you taking off the formulary and where is the money from that? It's a legitimate question, but the challenge is, quite frankly, that these drugs are, by and large, 20 or 30 years old, are no longer standard of care and because of that really have not cost us significant quantities of money. When there is a change in the drug budget, for example, the stuff that comes in could cost \$800,000 a year for a single patient to be treated, but the pills and the medications that we take off the other end are dollars and cents.

We have looked at best practices within the department. Again, the money that we have saved, we have repurposed. The budget which we took a lot of heat about over diabetic test strips, where all we did was simply say we will go to Canadian best practice. We're not doing anything revolutionary. We will move to Canadian best practice. We did that. That saved \$4.5 million each year since we did it, and that was three years ago. That money has been repurposed.

You might say: How does that help the debt? Well, if you look at CPI, the Consumer Price Index, if you look at the growth of other jurisdictions' health budget beyond that, simply staying at \$3 billion for each of the last three years represents a major milestone in health care expenditure. We are almost unique in the country in being able to do that. Again, one of the things we're not very good at is telling people what we actually do quite well at.

Again, I've strayed from the generalities of the budget into the specifics of my department. I do tend to get a bit adsorbed by health. It's been a career in many ways for a long time, so I beg the indulgence of the House.

To coin a comment from my more experienced parliamentary colleague: The best time to finish your speech is while you still have time left. What I would like to do at this point, Mr. Speaker, is given the hour of the day, I would move that debate on the budget now be adjourned, and I would further move that the House be adjourned.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: I require a seconder.

MR. HAGGIE: My apologies; seconded by the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

MR. SPEAKER: It has been 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 10 o'clock in the morning.

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