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Speaker: Honourable Ross Wiseman, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Wiseman): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: Today we will have members' statements from the Member for the District of Port au Port; the Member for the District of Bonavista North; the Member for the District of St. John's West; the Member for the District of Kilbride; the Member for the District of Torngat Mountains; and the Member for the District of Exploits.

The Member for the District of Port au Port.

MR. CORNECT: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Pat Marche on the publication of his book *Musicians of Bay St. George and the Port au Port Peninsula* which highlights the talents of local musicians from the 1940s to the present.

Mr. Marche was motivated to compile this book from his love of music and his desire to preserve our rich musical culture here in the Bay St. George-Port au Port Peninsula region.

Mr. Marche's book was launched this past November. The book tells the stories of over 500 featured musicians and it is complemented with more than 435 photographs. It is important to preserve our rich musical culture and heritage, as it is a part of who we are as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. members to join with me in applauding Mr. Pat Marche in his efforts that has led to the publication of this fine book that highlights the musical talents of people from the Bay St. George-Port au Port region.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Bonavista North.

MR. CROSS: Mr. Speaker, last week was office professionals week, so it gives me great pleasure to stand in this Chamber today to recognize someone who plays a very vital role in my day-to-day operations.

It is the professional expertise of administrative assistants, secretaries, and receptionists who keep the engines of business running everywhere – from small business to schools, modest offices to the upper reaches of multinational corporations.

The role of executive assistants has been recognized since the early 1950s, when industry boomed after World War II, calling upon primarily women to take on the role of assistants to the new captains of industry. Since then, a gender balance has taken place and the role is becoming increasingly important in the day-to-day operations of companies worldwide.

Valerie Hewitt is the engine that drives my constituency office. She is the first friendly voice that greets constituents, that reassuring tone, that calming influence. There is unanimity to the responses I receive from my constituents that they appreciate her caring, professional, and confidential dedication to their concerns.

The words organized, pleasant, dedicated, compassionate, and efficient are all rolled into one name – Valerie. I am sure all hon. members have their own Valeries or Ediths, Roberts or Justins, so I know you will make this unanimous as we tip our hats to our CAs and EAs for their contribution to our lives as MHAs.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for St. John's West.

MR. CRUMMELL: I rise today to congratulate the students and staff of Cowan Heights Elementary School on their Heritage Fair that took place on March 20.

I had the pleasure of attending the Heritage Fair, Mr. Speaker, and I have to say that there were some wonderful projects on display. Nearly fifty Cowan Heights students presented on this year's theme – My Province, Newfoundland and Labrador. As you can imagine, the projects covered a wide and interesting range of topics, and I can certainly understand why the eight community judges had difficulty in selecting finalists to represent Cowan Heights Elementary at the upcoming Regional Fair.

Mr. Speaker, the top three projects selected were Voisey's Bay Mine by Sarra Kenny and Emily Woodfine; Newfoundland Fisheries by Ethan Knight; and Newfoundland Wolf by Brianna Squires. The alternate project was Gros Morne National Park by Anna Taylor and Lillith Kelly.

Mr. Speaker, I commend these students, and indeed all students and staff at Cowan Heights Elementary, for the hard work that went into this year's Heritage Fair and I wish the finalists every success at the Regional Fair being held this weekend at St. Matthew's Elementary.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for the District of Kilbride.

MR. DINN: Mr. Speaker, I stand in this hon. House today to recognize the great effort of Hazelwood Elementary School, St. John's, in its Shave for the Brave Campaign.

On Monday, March 25, 2013, Hazelwood had its third Shave for the Brave in support of Young Adult Cancer Canada. A total of 113 students, staff, and parents participated in the shave.

In 2012, Hazelwood had the distinction of being named the Bravest School in Newfoundland and Labrador and Canada. The goal this year was to retain this title. The 133 heads shaved this year represents the highest number at any school ever and with this number, Hazelwood is certainly in the running to retain its title. To date, the school

has raised in excess of \$11,000 in its 2013 Shave for the Brave Campaign.

I ask all hon. members to join me in congratulating the students, staff, and parents of Hazelwood Elementary for a great job done in raising money and awareness for cancer research. I want to especially commend Principal Kirk Smith for his tremendous motivational efforts at Hazelwood.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to recognize Captain Mike Byrne for his forty-five years of service to the aviation industry in Labrador.

Mike began his career as a mechanic with Eastern Provincial Airways in 1958, and started flying in 1969. Since then, he has logged well over 40,000 hours of flying, many in a single-engine airplane throughout Labrador.

Mike also served as a pilot and chief pilot with Labrador Airways, now known as Air Labrador. Respected as an experienced and knowledgeable bush pilot, Captain Byrne transported everything from fuel drums to snowmobiles and caribou. He flew many medevac flights, transporting physicians and nurses to seriously ill patients in coastal remote communities, many years without modern navigational aids.

As a pioneer of the aviation industry to the Coast of Labrador and a close family friend, Mike has related many stories of heroism throughout his flying career, but none that he knowingly put himself or any of his passengers in potentially dangerous situations. He did what he loved most, helping people and flying airplanes.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. members to join me in congratulating and thanking Captain Mike

Byrne for his forty-five years of service to Labrador aviation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FORSEY: Mr. Speaker, in November of 2012, Bishop's Falls native Craig Harnum, Manager of the Marine Institute's Safety and Emergency Response Training Centre in Stephenville, was recognized for twenty-five years of volunteer fire service.

Craig practically grew up in the fire hall in Bishop's Falls. Craig's dad, Harry, volunteered for forty-two years and is the former fire chief.

Mr. Speaker, with his dad's forty-two years, his brother Hedley with forty, his brother Garry with thirty-nine, his nephew Stephen with eleven, and Craig's wife Sandee with ten, the family has 168 years of fire and emergency service. Craig said he was fortunate not to receive an injury in all these years and credits this to the knowledge he received from his father, and the training he underwent over the years. He said training is really the key.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of this House to join me in congratulating Craig Harnum and the Harnum family for their many years of dedicated volunteering service.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to inform people throughout the Province about a new nurse practitioner master's program offered through Memorial University School of Nursing, in collaboration with the Centre for Nursing Studies.

The Master of Nursing, Nurse Practitioner Option, which began in January 2013, will see the enrolment of twelve to sixteen women and men annually, as a result of a provincial government investment of approximately \$3.6 million in core funding over the next five years.

The program consists of twelve courses, and students may complete the program full-time in two years over six semesters, or part-time over ten semesters. The first class of students will graduate from this program in October 2014.

Mr. Speaker, nurse practitioners provide primary health care services and are particularly important in rural and remote areas where access to physician care is sometimes limited. The new master's program will prepare nurses to work in expanded roles in acute care areas such as emergency rooms, mental health and cardiac care, as well as long-term care and out-patient clinics.

This program is unique in that it is offered through distance education, which allows nurses to advance their education while continuing to work in their field. As a former teacher who taught courses through distance education for many years, I know first-hand the value and benefit of offering education through this innovative method.

Mr. Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador was one of the first Canadian provinces to introduce the nurse practitioner primary health care role. Currently, there are 123 nurse practitioners registered to practice in the Province. In 2011, we had twenty-one nurse practitioners per 100,000 people, the second-highest number in Canada. We have since increased this number to twenty-four.

Our government recognizes the vital role nursing professionals play in our health care

system. This master's program will not only deliver a higher level of education and training to nurse practitioners in the Province, but will advance patient-centred care and health care services overall now and in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

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

I thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement. Congratulations to Memorial University and the Centre for Nursing Studies on the establishment of the Nurse Practitioner Option within the Master of Nursing program.

The presence of nurse practitioners in our health care system is growing and their role in remote and rural communities is crucial, particularly given the challenges in physician recruitment and retention. Certainly, I know that in my district and in places like Ramea where they have had a lot of trouble filling the nurse practitioner position. We know the value of nurse practitioners given that Port aux Basques was amongst the first to get that. I take that was a Liberal government initiative as well.

Scopes of practice are being expanded for various health care professionals, such as nurse practitioners and licensed practical nurses. Our regional health authorities are adjusting skill-mix ratios to save the Province money. As a result of these changes, we are seeing nurses displaced from Central Health due to this practice and residents are concerned about the impact of these changes on their health and safety.

Ironically, we received numerous calls about the elimination of the nurse practitioner position in Central. While it was replaced with a clinical nurse educator, the person who filled that role was dedicated to the community. It is important to remember these just are not positions, they are

people. We wish the inaugural class of the master's program all the best.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I too thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement. Bravo to the MUN School of Nursing and the Centre for Nursing Studies. It is great to have this training program to increase the number of nurse practitioners in our Province. Their role is crucial to a fully comprehensive health care primary care model. As well, they can reduce wait times in emergency departments and can provide high levels of care to those who do not have access to a family doctor.

I hope government will follow this initiative up with a commitment to ensure that more nurse practitioners are hired by regional health authorities in every region to work with doctors, RNs, and the communities to improve our primary health care system. Bravo, Mr. Speaker. I am sure my colleagues would like to join me in saying bravo to those nurses who have dedicated their lives to taking care of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Conservation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HEDDERSON: Mr. Speaker, I rise to remind my hon. colleagues that the deadline for nominations for the 2013 Environmental Awards, May 1, is fast approaching. This awards program is an annual celebration of

environmental achievements in our Province, and raises awareness of the individuals, groups and businesses that are taking action to protect and sustain our environment.

This initiative, Mr. Speaker, is jointly sponsored by the Department of Environment and Conservation, the Multi-Materials Stewardship Board, and the Newfoundland and Labrador Women's Institutes. There are six categories to recognize outstanding environmental and conservation achievements. These are: Individual; Community Group or Organization; Youth, Youth Group or School; Municipality or Regional Waste Management Committee; and, Business or Industry Leader.

In addition to being celebrated at an awards ceremony during Environment Week, Mr. Speaker, each of the winners will also receive a \$1,000 honorarium from the MMSB to go towards furthering their own environmental projects or to donate to an environmental cause of their choice.

Mr. Speaker, for more than twenty years, these annual awards have highlighted the work of countless men and women who are true environmental ambassadors for this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. We all share responsibility for the environment in our Province, and that is why it is so important to recognize the great work that is being done by those who demonstrate an impressive passion for our environment.

I encourage everyone, Mr. Speaker, to look around them at the great work that is being done to protect and preserve our environment, and submit a nomination to recognize these outstanding individuals and groups. Further information and the nomination form can be found on the Department of Environment and Conservation Web site.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. The annual environmental awards are indeed important and events such as these are something that should be celebrated throughout the Province.

Mr. Speaker, what I see here is a situation where names may not have been submitted and with just two days left, I would encourage that more effort be put into these awards and having people in place before the deadlines do come upon us.

Mr. Speaker, I know there are many individuals, groups and businesses in our Province that are leading the way in environmental awareness. I, too, encourage individuals to have their names put forward for these awards.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would also like to thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement.

All projects, of course, having to do with the environment are very noteworthy. We can talk about a couple of projects that I have run into in a very short parliamentary career so far. I can note, for example, Mr. Juergen Schau's project dealing with puffins down in the District of Ferryland. I can talk about the Salmonid Association dealing with the Rennie's River project. Hopefully, they are going to be introducing salmon, for example, in the Rennie's Mill River.

I would be remiss, as well, if I did not talk about some of the groups in Newfoundland and Labrador that do things without government funding or have lost government funding. The Newfoundland and Labrador Environmental Network, for example, has lost funding in this

last budgetary process. We are at risk of losing that particular umbrella organization within the Province.

I ask government to reconsider sometimes where their monies should be directed. If we are to be out there looking after our environment we need to put money upfront sometimes in order to enjoy the rewards of environmental protection. I would also like to say that some people out there do it for absolutely nothing, and I can think of the Grand Riverkeepers in Labrador. I can think of the Sandy Pond Alliance out there that are working so hard for environmental protection in this Province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There will be fewer acute care beds in the new Corner Brook hospital, and to accommodate this downsizing the plan is to shorten hospital stays by 25 per cent. We all know that regional health authorities are undergoing efficiency reviews and that nursing positions may be cut. Research, however, shows that when nursing staffing levels go down, length of stays go up.

I ask the Minister of Health: Do you really think that cutting nursing and shortening hospital stays can be achieved simultaneously when research shows otherwise?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we have proposed a facility for Corner Brook that will be second to none.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SULLIVAN: We are looking at \$500 million to \$600 million worth of expenditure. It will be a flagship service for the entire of the Province, Mr. Speaker. It will be a model that we are going to want to use in the entire of the Province.

Mr. Speaker, we have had some disagreements around what the numbers look like in terms of acute care. When we received the report, Mr. Speaker, what we got was a report that emphasized the importance of the right service to the right clients at the right time.

In the Corner Brook hospital, Mr. Speaker, or the Western Memorial Hospital, we are looking at being able to put forward 260 beds.

Mr. Speaker, I hope I get another question so I can continue.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. BALL: The minister does not have to worry about questions coming from the West Coast about the new hospital. There are lots of questions coming out there. There is lots of misinformation too, I might add, Mr. Speaker.

Today, we will be presenting a petition on behalf of the Newfoundland and Labrador Nurses' Union. This petition has 4,500 names from the residents of Central Newfoundland regarding cuts to nursing positions in the region.

I ask the Minister of Health: Is this a compelling argument or is this just noise?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, further to the last question, I just want to follow up that we will have 260 beds in there that will more than adequately meet the needs of the people of the Western Region of the Province.

With regard to the nursing question that he is asking about in Central Health, Mr. Speaker, what we are talking about in Central Health is implementing models of nursing care that have been on the go since 2006. There is nothing new that is happening there, Mr. Speaker.

In fact, what we are talking about in long-term care, the new skills mix ratio, came about as a result of a provincial committee that was put in place and recommended this new skills mix that will often see, Mr. Speaker, more people working within our health facilities.

Again, I am hoping for another question.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The hallmark of this government continues to be secrecy. Following on the steps of twelve senior appointments, hidden by this government, it appointed a transition team to oversee school board collapse without any public input.

I ask the minister: Will he table the detailed mandate of the transition team, which would include timelines for accountability and the autonomy that is has provided through this board?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A transition committee that is made of up of trustees from the four existing boards – Mr. Lorne Wheeler this morning, the Chair of that committee, is in contact with the individuals who make up that transition team. Things are progressing quite well.

Mr. Speaker, if I were to interfere, I would assume the member would talk about political interference. The reason for the transition committee is we will allow them to do their work. They will determine and move ahead with it to ensure we continue with a quality education in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. BALL: I will ask the minister a simple question here now, then: If they came back with a recommendation not to go to one school board, would you accept that recommendation?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, that is putting the cart before the horse. We have a transition committee in place. I would suggest anyone out there who has suggestions, please put them forward to the transition committee, and we will then move ahead with the planning that we need to ensure that it is a smooth process.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I believe the minister by his own admission just put the cart before the horse. That was not the transition team or the trustees that you could actually report to. It was this government who

made the decision and then asked for information later.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Education has stated that the mega-school board approach is based on changing demographics. So I ask the minister: Has government carried out a proper study to determine if one board is even manageable in this Province?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I am going to ask the member again: Is he willing to stand up and say that we will allow the boards to continue and then take away from the students and the teachers? Is that what he is saying?

I will quote another one from one of the members opposite in the Liberals in 1999, Mr. Speaker, "Today we are at 97,000. I am sure the members opposite do not expect us to maintain the same level of teachers in the system with that kind of declining student enrolment. Maybe they do, but it is always easy to promise when you do not have to deliver."

This is about efficiency. We are determined to put it in the hands of teachers and students, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. BALL: I think the minister missed the question again, because the question was about if it is manageable, not about the efficiency, I say, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BALL: Mr. Speaker, the NLTA stresses that a 40 per cent cut to needs-based teaching will be detrimental to teachers dealing with

complex issues like autism, drugs, and bullying in our system.

So I ask the minister: By making these cuts, how much money do you really plan to save on the backs of our most vulnerable, our children?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I will caution the hon. member, because I mentioned in here – he mentioned cuts to services for students with autism. Mr. Speaker, we are not cutting that.

I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, in 2007, despite a 2,200 student decline, we put thirty-eight additional teachers in the system. In 2008, with another 1,400 student decline, we added another sixty-five. With the needs-based formula that came in 2008, there are an additional 265 teachers in the system today because of that. Never question our commitment to education.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: I will ask the minister one more time: How much money do you expect to save by cutting the needs-based system by 40 per cent? How much? What is the dollar value?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I am going to speak again to our commitment to the education system. This education system is staffed and funded now better than ever in the history of this Province. Our commitment, Mr. Speaker, has been a 42 per cent increase in funding for education since we came into government in 2004.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister who is making the decision obviously does not know how much savings he is making from this decision. Mr. Speaker, the message is loud and clear. Educators, administrators, and school boards are warning that government cuts to 160 positions will seriously impact the education of our students.

I ask the minister: Why is he refusing to listen to this compelling argument, or is this just noise?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Education.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, no changes to classroom caps, no cuts to special education services, no cuts to supports for special needs students, no cuts to student assistants. Mr. Speaker, that speaks to our investment in front line services where it is most important.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, there is a full litany and a full list of cuts I say, Mr. Speaker. I believe the minister, quite frankly, just ignored to list those.

The day before government dropped the Budget and laid off 1,000 Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, they made ten secret appointments to the civil service. Then they added another one on Budget day and another one the day after, for a total of twelve. Traditionally, senior appointments are announced by a press release, which would explain the background of the person who got the job and the rationale behind it.

Why was there no public release at that time?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENNEDY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

During the Budget process, we actually eliminated ten positions from the number of executive positions in government, bringing it from 121 to 111. The appointments that were made at the timeframe that the member is talking about are all people who are within the public service, and they were either moving laterally or moving within their departments.

There were no new jobs created, Mr. Speaker. They were not new appointments. For example, in Health and Community Services three people moved. An ADM moved to another position, a Director became an ADM. So what we have is simply a situation where there were a number of appointments made. There was no news release at that point in time, Mr. Speaker, because we knew that the Orders in Council will be published online very shortly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In the Budget announcement it was very clear that if there were vacant positions within the public service they were not filled. Why were they filled when the hiring freeze was on?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENNEDY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The hiring freeze related to core departments, or what went on within our sixteen departments. The appointments to executive positions are within the discretion of the Premier, Mr. Speaker, and the Order in Council, or the MC

clearly indicated that the appointments to executive appointments did not come within the hiring freeze.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bay of Islands.

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, the construction of the Sir Ambrose Shea bridge in Placentia has been stalled because the government refuses to pay its permit fees or have them included in the tender documents.

I ask the minister: Why is government refusing to pay the Town of Placentia the cost of its permit fees, which they are allowed to charge under the Municipalities Act?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to point out to the hon. member and to the members of the House of Assembly that we invest tens of millions of dollars in roads, provincial roads, and provincial roadwork throughout the Province. That includes asphalt, it includes replacement of culverts, it includes building of bridges and wharves, and nowhere in the Province do we pay municipal permit fees, Mr. Speaker, while we build those highway infrastructures.

I will just use as an example, Team Gushue Highway, a big project being conducted by this government, going right through the centre of St. John's, zero dollars for permits. The new overpass at Topsail Road and Kenmount Road, just recently built with no permits. The Conception Bay South Bypass Road – another significant investment by this Province – bridges being built out there, Mr. Speaker, at no cost of permits.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bay of Islands.

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I say to the minister, the reason why they need the fees is that the town has to protect its infrastructure. They do not have the personnel on staff, the professionals on staff, to ensure the water and sewer –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, there are two archaeological sites that are going to be in this area. They need to hire an archaeologist. Do you expect the town to pay for this?

I ask the minister again: How can you stop paying a fee for the town which is under the Municipalities Act, which they can charge, that you are arbitrarily saying no, we are not going to pay this fee?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the first thing I would like to straighten out in the preamble of the hon. member opposite is that the infrastructure we are building there is infrastructure belonging to the taxpayers of Newfoundland and Labrador. It is a piece of provincial infrastructure, part of our provincial road network that extends throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

As for the second part of his question, as far as archaeology concerns go – and there are issues regarding archaeology, as addressed by the hon. member opposite – our staff, the senior staff, senior officials in my department have been working very closely with the town in regard to engineering, in regard to archaeological needs, the resources that the town has versus the resources that the Province can bring forward

and assist them with, and those discussions will continue, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Bay of Islands.

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, in 2007 the development of the RNC headquarters in St. John's was announced and the total cost was budgeted to be \$48 million and the completion by 2012. We now know from the ATIPP request submitted by our office that the cost is expected to be over \$57 million and it is not going to be finished until the earliest at 2014.

I ask the minister: How can your budget process be so wrong and yet have another project be so over budget?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The redevelopment of the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary headquarters site in the centre of St. John's is a significant project for this Province and for this government. It is another benchmark of the investments that we are making in the Province and the infrastructure of the Province.

This project began many years ago, Mr. Speaker. It began in 2007. At the time, because the RNC continue to operate and function in that site – they are a twenty-four hour, seven-day week service – it was believed very early in the project that the use of the site could continue while the project continued; however, Mr. Speaker, after a period of time when engineers began to look inside the building to see what work was actually necessary, and that quite often takes some time to do, a better understanding was grasped after the project proceeded.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Bay of Islands.

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, the RNC building is now expected to be almost \$10 million over budget. That is almost a 20 per cent increase in cost.

I ask the minister: How can you be part of a government that says the Muskrat Falls Project will not have any cost overruns, but every project that you were involved with in the last three years is from 20 per cent to 50 per cent in cost overruns?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, what the member opposite is failing to point out is that there is a significant difference in a renovation, a significant renovation project, versus a new build. When you get into a renovation project, the engineering design work is done to the best of the abilities of the engineers and the designers who look at the project.

Not until you get inside the walls of a project and you start taking down walls, you start looking at mechanical, you look at electrical and you look at structures, do you get an actual determination of the scope of work that is needed. It is very different from Muskrat Falls, Mr. Speaker, which is going to be a great project for Newfoundland and Labrador and is going to be a great project for generations to come.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Mr. Speaker, last week when I asked the Minister of Environment about an oil slick near Fogo, he put it off as a federal issue. Environment Canada has since confirmed an oil slick in the area and is working to pinpoint the source.

I ask the minister: What new information does he have on this issue and what is the provincial government doing to assist the investigation?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Environment and Conservation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HEDDERSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In my response last week I certainly indicated that it was a federal responsibility, but being a federal responsibility does not mean that the provincial government are not involved. As well, we went to the main source, asked the right questions and were told, basically, that there was an investigation on the go as to the type of oil slick that it was. We have been further advised that they are going further into their investigation and going underneath the sea to see exactly what is down there.

I will tell the member we are involved. Again, kudos to the federal government for being on top of this, moving forward, and trying to get to the bottom of a very serious issue.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains, for a very quick question without preamble.

MR. EDMUNDS: I ask the Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture: What is your department's role in this investigation and what risk does this oil slick pose to our fish stocks in the area?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Environments and Conservation, for a quick response.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HEDDERSON: Again, very quickly, Mr. Speaker, I would give some sense of comfort to the member opposite by saying that all aspects of this spill are being looked at. There has been monitoring; all resources have been thrown at it.

We as a provincial government are making sure that everything has been done to the satisfaction and we hope that the end result will be a very positive one.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Leader of the Third Party.

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government announced today that it has lifted the temporary suspension on hiring, saying recruitment for government jobs will begin as of today. The timing of this announcement is perplexing. The release says that there has been an accumulation of vacancies because of normal employee turnover, retirement, and long-term leave.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Finance: Were these positions immune from the bumping process that has just gone on in public sector? If so, why?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENNEDY: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we were criticized for bringing in the hiring freeze and now we are being criticized for lifting the hiring freeze.

Mr. Speaker, the hiring freeze was brought in because we wanted to get the full picture that exists in government in terms of the number of people who had jobs and how it related to the core mandate review. What has happened is that there are no new positions being created. The positions that we are talking about have funding in Budget 2013.

What happened is that the exemptions to the hiring freeze were very difficult to come by. So what we are doing now is we have a new process in place that will have strict criteria. All

filling of positions within government will have to follow that procedure, Mr. Speaker. There is nothing suspicious that I am aware of and it had nothing to do with the bumping process.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS MICHAEL: The minister did not answer the question. I wanted to know why they were not a part of the bumping process. If people could be bumped into those, why were they not bumped into them? That is the question. He is not going to answer it, so I will move on.

Mr. Speaker, the government says it remains committed to providing job experiences for students and will continue to have a program for co-op students and summer students.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Finance: Is this government committing to keeping the same number of co-op and summer jobs for summer students who greatly need the employment experience as they have had before?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENNEDY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can tell the member opposite that the e-mail from which she got her question, I replied to the same gentleman earlier today and said that student jobs and co-op student jobs are still in place. I indicated approximately a month ago that students would still be hired, that the hiring freeze would not apply to them.

We are certainly committed to ensuring that students are employed, Mr. Speaker. There will be jobs here for them this summer, co-op students and all students, because we understand

that the youth of our Province need jobs in the summertime and we will provide those jobs for them.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My question came directly from the release that came from the minister. That is where my question came from.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS MICHAEL: Very often our students hope that such temporary situations will lead to permanent jobs. This announcement is cold comfort to all those students, many of whom will have to leave the Province due to the chill that has fallen over it.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Finance: What that commitment will do for students who have graduated from programs and need permanent employment?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENNEDY: Yes, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite still seems to be in the 1990s when there might not have been as many jobs available.

Let me tell you the situation that currently exists in our Province, Mr. Speaker. We have for students the lowest tuition fees in the country. We are second in the country in weekly earnings. We have more people working today than ever in our history.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENNEDY: Since 2003, our unemployment rate has declined by 3.9 percentage points, the lowest in thirty-seven years, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENNEDY: Capital investment has increased in our Province by 170 per cent since 2003. It is the land of opportunity for new students and they do not only have to rely upon government for jobs, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I would now ask –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I now ask the minister to table tomorrow in this House of Assembly the number of people who have to leave the Province to get jobs.

Mr. Speaker, in the Sustainability Plan it says that in years four to ten government will continue to focus on innovation, diversification, and debt reduction.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Finance to outline for us what great innovations this government has in mind for economic diversification since there is actually nothing outlined in the current so-called Sustainability Plan?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENNEDY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Let me continue where I just left off. What do we have happening in this Province in the next number of years? Building Muskrat Falls, 3,000 jobs, many of which are union members, and the NDP do not support that, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENNEDY: We have Bull Arm, Hebron going, 3,000 jobs, and mostly union jobs. The NDP probably do not support that either, Mr. Speaker. We have continued diversity in the industries as outlined by the Minister of Innovation, Business and Rural Development.

What we have, Mr. Speaker, is in this year's Budget alone another \$1 billion to support children and families. We have lowered taxes by \$500 million since 2007. We have the most competitive tax regime in Atlantic Canada. The good things continue, Mr. Speaker, and I would suggest to the member: read the Budget.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS MICHAEL: Mr. Speaker, Statistics Canada explained this Province's notable fall in GDP last year, a whopping 4.6 per cent, as a decline in oil and gas extraction due to maintenance work as well as a decline of metal ore mining. That should not have surprised this government, Mr. Speaker, yet they projected that 0.01 per cent of GDP would be what we would have this year.

I ask the Minister of Finance: Once again, how could they have been so far out in their projections?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Finance.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENNEDY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

GDP, as Telegram James was noticing on Twitter today, Mr. Speaker, is a notoriously unreliable measurement in a small resource-based economy like ours. Oil production is up, GDP is up; oil production is down, GDP is down.

I did indicate, Mr. Speaker, that oil production is an issue that we have to deal with. We get the numbers twice a year, once in January and once in June. In one year, Mr. Speaker, a couple of years ago, the C-NLOPB projections were off by 18 million barrels. Obviously, Mr. Speaker, GDP will be affected.

What we have to look at is what is happening in this Province. Again, let me repeat that we have the lowest unemployment rate in thirty-seven years and more people working today than ever in our history.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The Member for The Straits – White Bay North.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Mr. Speaker, advanced telecommunication is essential to economic development. Last month the feds announced \$1.35 million to improve broadband services to North West River and Sheshatshiu. Announced in 2011, the Province, the feds, Bell, SmartLabrador and Nalcor were investing \$24 million to provide fiber backbone to 19,000 people in Central and Western Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, with Muskrat Fall passing along the communities of the South Coast of Labrador and the Great Northern Peninsula, I ask the Minister of IBRD: When can they expect to see similar investments of adding broadband and dealing with chronic capacity issues, or will they continue to remain forgotten?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Innovation, Business and Rural Development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we have been heavily involved as we know, the hon. member knows and the members in this House, in terms of high speed and rural broadband initiatives for the past number of years. We have increased it now to almost 89 per cent on the Island and over 95 per cent in Labrador. This year's Budget is \$6.3 million again to reinvest.

Coming this week, again, as part of the second RBI, we will be announcing twenty-six additional communities that will receive through the program. We are continuing to build it.

With regard to Nalcor, in consultations with them, when they build the transmission line there will be fibre on that transmission line which will come down to Southern Labrador. There could be opportunities there, we believe there are opportunities there, and we will maximize them for the people of Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for The Straits – White Bay North.

MR. MITCHELMORE: I certainly hope the minister is not going to forget the Great Northern Peninsula as well.

Mr. Speaker, Air Access Strategy funding was cut midway through its five years. As well, the five-year Northern Strategy Plan of 2007 says it will finalize its decision on a central airport for Southern Labrador.

The people do not have a reliable air service, limiting economic growth in Southeastern Labrador, and are calling for an enhanced service capable of handling aircraft larger than a Twin Otter.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of IBRD: What is the status of a centralized airstrip, or are you abandoning this commitment like the Air Access Strategy?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There are airstrips located throughout Labrador and also throughout the Island of Newfoundland. We realize, understand and appreciate that the airstrips in Labrador in particular are of significant importance to the people of Labrador. We have a funding arrangement with the federal government; it is an annual funding arrangement. We continue to have discussions with them on ways that we can make improvement to airstrips and air services in Labrador through a way to enhance that agreement between us and the federal government. We will continue to make those advancements, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The Member for St. John's East.

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Last week our private member's motion in the House called for government to implement a strategy geared toward roads and the provincial ferry system. Sadly, the government voted against the motion, even though they put it in the election Blue Book, as far back as 2003.

If government says it already has a strategy for ferries, then where is it? Will they make the documents public?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to thank the hon. member for giving me an opportunity to rise again and talk about the great investments we are making in ferry

services throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Order, please!

MR. DAVIS: Mr. Speaker, we currently have an RFP that has been issued to build a replacement vessel for the *Captain Earl Winsor* which provides service to the people of Change Islands and Fogo Island. It is providing very good service to the people of Change Islands and Fogo Island, Mr. Speaker. It is going to be a significant vessel, a significant build, the largest one, probably ever, that we have done in the Province.

As well, Mr. Speaker, that RFP includes the ability now to build and construct a new forty-two metre swing vessel for the people of the Province. This will be similar to the *Grace Sparkes* and *Hazel McIsaac* which is providing good services to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker, and we will continue to make those investments in ferry services throughout the Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MURPHY: I would say, Mr. Speaker, he is not giving his fellow Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island a very good hand answering that one.

Mr. Speaker, the motion also talked about the need for a permanent road construction strategy that government also voted against. What is the difficulty that government must see that they cannot put forward a transparent road strategy for this Province?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Transportation and Works.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we have two vessels that are providing services to the people of Bell Island. While vessels require having routine maintenance, at times they have mechanical matters that need to be addressed as they operate. Like any mechanical item, as it is utilized, it requires maintenance and it requires work.

I would say to the hon. member opposite that the two vessels that we have operating right now, considering the vessels that we have available to us, are providing a continuous and a good service for the people of Bell Island.

As for the rest of his question, Mr. Speaker, on planning for roads and the development, we have made a commitment to the people of the Province that we would work to come forward with a greater plan for our infrastructure within the Province and we intend to do that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of documents.

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I give notice under Standing Order 11 that I shall move that this House not adjourn 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, April 30, 2013; and further, I give notice, under Standing Order 11, I shall move that this House not adjourn 10:00 p.m. on Tuesday, April 30, 2013.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CRUMMELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to move the following private member's resolution for Wednesday, May 1, this coming Wednesday, seconded by the Member for Bonavista North:

BE IT RESOLVED that this hon. House supports this government's actions to ensure that public programs and services for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are designed and delivered in ways that are results focused and effective, as well as innovative, efficient, and affordable.

MR. SPEAKER: Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. Barbe.

MR. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, a petition to the hon. House of Assembly of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in Parliament Assembled, the petition of the undersigned humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS the offshore of the West Coast of the Island of Newfoundland is recognized as a region containing potentially billions of barrels of oil; and

WHEREAS hydraulic fracturing could be an accepted and effective method of petroleum discovery and exploration, and is compatible with the protection of the natural environment and water sources when executed within the context of a comprehensive regulatory framework; and

WHEREAS the petroleum exploration sector needs the certainty and confidence of a stable regulatory regime; and

WHEREAS with that regulatory regime, oil discovery and industry development could provide unprecedented economic opportunity and bring people home to a currently economically challenged area; and

WHEREAS the undersigned support properly regulated exploration and development of the oil and gas resource in the Province; –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BENNETT: WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to introduce a regulatory framework immediately under which hydraulic fracturing could proceed safely, and move this industry forward in Western Newfoundland.

Mr. Speaker, as all of us are aware, there are significant news stories regarding hydraulic fracturing. Many of these stories are sensational. Many of the stories have absolutely nothing to do with the type of exploration that is contemplated in this region. It is incomprehensible why people, for example, a member of the town council in Bay of Islands in the last few days, talked about having sea spray on their house windows and now expecting to have chemicals from hydraulic fracturing from out in Bay of Islands spray on their windows.

Some of these things are absolutely ludicrous. Mr. Speaker, the things people think of as they see a movie where somebody turns on a water tap and sees flames come out of their water faucets. It makes absolutely no sense whatsoever.

There is a great concern in the region that I represent, that the people who are putting forth these unfounded histrionic complaints may carry the day. There is such a groundswell on the ground by people who want to see common sense, regulated, appropriate development. The petitions have started to come in, and I expect

them to come steadily from the people who are pro-development and pro-employment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS as a result of a recommendation in the Green report about wrongdoing in the House of Assembly, there is now legislation that protects anyone who speaks up with evidence of financial abuse or other impropriety in the legislative branch; and

WHEREAS it is unfair for one group of civil servants to be protected by whistle-blower legislation when another group is not; and

WHEREAS Justice Green stated that the financial wrongdoing in the House of Assembly might have been discovered sooner if whistle-blower legislation had been in place; and

WHEREAS the Cameron Inquiry into ER-PR testing found that problems with tests would have come to light sooner, therefore lessening the impacts on patients, if whistle-blower legislation had been in place; and

WHEREAS the Task Force on Adverse Events recommended an amendment to the Regional Health Authorities Act to provide legal protection for employees reporting occurrences or adverse events; and

WHEREAS whistle-blower legislation is in place elsewhere in Canada and the provincial government promised similar legislation in the 2007 election but has not kept that promise;

We the undersigned, petition the House of Assembly to urge government to enact whistle-

blower legislation to protect public sector employees in provincial departments and agencies, including public corporations, regional health authorities and schools boards.

And as in duty bound your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I had the honour yesterday of attending a day of mourning for workers injured or who have lost their lives on the job. It was quite a moving ceremony. There were well past 100 people there with over fifty wreaths laid on behalf of workers and different employers and groups, just to show how this issue is of growing importance to the people in the Province.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps in some cases we honoured and remembered six injured workers who died by accidents, this year alone, on the job, and twenty who died because of workplace related diseases. Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, if we had effective whistle-blower legislation, protection for people who want to speak out about unsafe working conditions perhaps that could save lives.

This government once again promised the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to pass whistle-blower legislation and they have absolutely done nothing to further this. As a matter of fact, last year, about a year ago, I asked the Minister of Justice at the time and he said no. This is a sad state of affairs for our Province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

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

I stand today to enter a petition.

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

WHEREAS Central Health is planning to reduce the number of registered nurses working in numerous facilities throughout Central Newfoundland; and

WHEREAS registered nurses and community members from Central Newfoundland have serious concerns over the impact these staffing changes will have on patient and resident care; and

WHEREAS registered nurses provide an expert level of care and bring value to the health care system that no other health care provider can, and registered nurses are the only nursing professionals who can independently provide care when health conditions are complex and unstable, and health outcomes are unpredictable; and

WHEREAS it is proven through research that registered nurses improve patient outcomes, reduce mortality and enhance the quality of care, and that higher registered nurse ratios result in fewer death, pressure ulcers, pneumonia, post-operative infections, urinary tract infections, gastrointestinal bleeds and cardiac arrests, with results also including shorter lengths of stay, improved failure to rescue rates, and superior organizational effectiveness and budgetary outcomes;

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I ask all members if they would take their private conversations outside the Chambers, please.

I recognize the Member for Burgeo – La Poile in presenting a petition.

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

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to call on Central Regional Health Authority to re-examine the proposed registered nurse

reductions, ensuring high quality care for the residents of Central Newfoundland.

And as in duty bound your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this is probably the largest petition I have ever entered in this House of Assembly, with over 4,500 names of people from the Central area who have signed, people who live in communities all over Central, communities that are represented by members, especially on the government side. I would think the 4,500 names signed here being entered today is what we would call compelling argument.

One of the things we talked about when we did Health budget Estimates the other night was trying to reduce patient stay. At the same time, talking about how much cost that has but if you are going to reduce the nursing complement, studies show that the stay is going to go up. So, unless there is some research that we are unaware of, I do not know how this is possible.

There are a number of opportunities we have to look at this, to make sure that we are making the right choice, and to listen to the experts in the field, to work with them to make sure that the proper health and care is provided to residents. We look at the situation out in Lewisporte where we are going to have one RN on a long-term care overnight facility, just one for a number of patients. This is just one of the concerns that we have.

I am very happy to stand here today and enter the concerns of the residents of Central Newfoundland. It is not going to stop there. I have fears that this is going to continue elsewhere, that it is going to move to Western Newfoundland and up to Labrador Grenfell. We have to make sure that with these Budget cuts do not come reduced health and safety for the people of this Province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. KING: Mr. Speaker, I would like to give notice to the House that the motion laid before us a few moments ago by the Member for St. John's West will be the private member's motion that government will debate this coming Wednesday, Private Members' Day.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. Barbe.

MR. BENNETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS there has been an agreement between the Federation of Newfoundland Indians and the Government of Canada to recognize the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation Band; and

WHEREAS persons submitted applications with the required documents for registration in the band up to the application deadline of November 30, 2012; and

WHEREAS the reported number of applications received by the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation Band are in excess of 100,000; and

WHEREAS the reported number of applicants now registered as members is approximately 22,000; and

WHEREAS the agreement between the Federation of Newfoundland Indians and the Government of Canada for recognition of the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation Band is scheduled to end on March 31, 2013; and

WHEREAS the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation Band Chief has requested, but has not received, an extension to the agreement to process the remaining applications; and

WHEREAS to date there is no decision on how to deal with the remaining applications;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to work with the Newfoundland Federation of Indians and the Government to Canada to provide a fair and equal review of all their applications.

As in duty bound your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, the applications have been filed. More recently, we have noticed maybe a thawing in what the federal counterpart has said. They finally acknowledge that they were absolutely overwhelmed with petitions. Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, that does not relieve our government of the obligation to intervene on behalf of between 70,000 and 80,000 more people who are unrecognized, who are residents of this Province.

Mr. Speaker, what excuse can this government possibly have when people are bringing petitions day after day after asking and outlining these circumstances to say that we want to have our petition heard, we want to have our applications reviewed, and we want this matter to move forward? They have established a significant Facebook presence. They are following this thing. There have been public demonstrations and significant input. This is simply a request of government, by these people, to intervene with the federal counterpart and move this file forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I call from the Order Paper, Motion 1, that this House approves in general the budgetary policy of the government. The Budget Speech, Mr. Speaker.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am grateful for the opportunity to stand in this House today to speak to the Budget, and I am especially honoured to speak on behalf of the good people of St. John's Centre.

Mr. Speaker, the last ten years have been a very —

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the last ten years have been a very interesting time for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. There were promises and celebrations and declarations. We saw roads built, school books paid for, tuition reduced, more people were hired through the public service. There were jobs and a Poverty Reduction Strategy that promised to make Newfoundland and Labrador the Province with the lowest level of poverty by the end of 2013. Newfoundland and Labrador was open for business.

There was a Youth Retention Strategy to encourage our young people to stay in this land of opportunity. There was even money to help you when you had a baby, and folks were coming back home. We were, said the government, flush with cash, and never, never in our history did we experience so much prosperity. We celebrated, Mr. Speaker, with our artists. We sang, and there was dancing and painting and making of movies, and, oh yeah, there was making of TV. Mr. Speaker, it just happens to be the International Day of Dance.

We were going to be a powerhouse of electricity. We were going to dam Muskrat Falls and the US was going to be pounding on our doors looking for power. We were going to be even richer. Oil flowed and it was good. Yes, by God, we were a have Province. Why, they even considered having a holiday to celebrate that, but on Tuesday, March 26, 2013 it all came to a screeching halt.

This government, Mr. Speaker, the same government who promised so much ground to a halt, bellowing: Wait, things have changed and now we are taking it back. They are taking a lot of it back from a lot of people. Thursday, in this House, a member of this government actually stood up and said that the people of this Province got spoiled, and that public servants got spoiled. So the undoing began.

This Budget 2013 is one of the most regressive Budgets this Province has seen. After so much was promised, where did it go, Mr. Speaker? Where did our prosperity go, the prosperity that belongs to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador?

This time last year, the former Minister of Finance told reporters the day before the Budget came down, “We could have done it in one year... We could have cut \$258 million, and cut a lot of jobs. We decided that we’re not going to do it in one or two years. We decided that we’re going to have a 10-year plan and that we’re going to get where we have to be over that time.”

In a CBC article last year, in an interview with the former Minister of Finance, he “...indicated that some savings could be realized through attrition. He noted that 24 per cent of the core civil service will be eligible to retire over the next five years. Other workers, he said, will depart of their own accord for the private sector.”

The minister said, “We will take advantage of those voluntary retirements and those voluntary resignations in order to manage the size of our core public service so that it’s sustainable over the long term”. He said, Mr. Speaker, that we are not going to do it in one or two years, but over a period of ten years.

“In fact, the 10-year plan did not appear to be referenced at all in the reams of budget documents that were tabled...” last year. “It instead came up when...” the minister “... was questioned by reporters.

“While there are currently more than 9,000 people employed in core government departments,” the minister said “... there are no targets involved.

“‘Nobody is fired; nobody is let go,’ he said. ‘But we still will accomplish our objective to reduce the size of the public service.’”

So, Mr. Speaker, what a difference a year makes. The loss of upwards of 2,000 public service jobs through layoffs, attrition, and leaving vacant positions unfilled. The cancelling of the Family Violence Intervention Court, a court that reduced recidivism in family violence by 75 per cent, that protected women, children, and health offenders rehabilitate. It was a shining example across the country.

The privatization of part of our basic education system through the discontinuation of Adult Basic Education at the College of the North Atlantic; cancelling of the ABE program at the Waterford Centre that provided total support and wraparound services for people with complex mental issues, people who could in no way pursue their education in a mainstream school setting, cancelled without notice.

There are cuts so deep to the justice system that they threw the system into chaos; cuts so deep to fish and wildlife enforcement that many parts of the Province are covered by lone officers who are armed – lone officers, working alone and will have to go off by themselves far into the woods to pursue armed poachers. Mr. Speaker, this is actually the case. This is madness, to send our armed officers into the woods to apprehend groups of people who are armed, all by themselves, Mr. Speaker. It is total madness.

There are cuts of \$10 million to the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation when we are in the middle of a housing crisis Province-wide with sky-rocketing costs and 0 per cent vacancy rates, especially in the areas where large-scale resource development is happening. This housing crisis is affecting young people, seniors, young working families, and there is no relief in sight.

This government has washed its hands and said it is not our problem; the market will take care of it. Well, Mr. Speaker, the market is not taking care of it, and this government is not taking care of it. The cutting back of the Residential Energy Efficiency Program by 50 per cent when worldwide governments are helping their citizens make their homes as energy efficient as possible. This is happening all over the world. This cut, Mr. Speaker, absolutely flies in the face of logic.

There are no publicly administered and provided home care programs. Families are struggling to care for their elderly. No real child care program. Families once again are struggling trying to co-ordinate and pay for child care. More and more of our seniors are slipping into poverty using food banks, spending 50 per cent and more of their meagre incomes on housing.

Health care, the loss of 125 managers, and we do not yet know who or what those jobs are and how it will affect the service to the public. The loss of some of our youngest and our brightest, and our most committed and dedicated young people working in the health and wellness promotion plan, gone without notice, Mr. Speaker, absolutely gone. The cutting of hundreds of EAS jobs, and, Mr. Speaker, there is more to come. This is only touching the tip of the iceberg.

So, Mr. Speaker, what happened? What went wrong? Last year, the former Minister of Finance said: the deficit was expected to be \$258.4 million in 2012-2013. Only four months ago, when the Premier was pushing Muskrat Falls through the House with no proper debate, ignoring our Public Utilities Board, she said we were in great financial shape.

Only a few months ago, the Minister of Finance said our projected deficit was going to be \$1.6 billion. Then within a month of that, it was changed to \$563.8 million. People joked that if they held off with the Budget a few more months, then maybe we would actually be in a surplus at that rate. Really, Mr. Speaker, it is not a laughing matter; these are serious issues.

Mr. Speaker, we have all heard these numbers, but really what do they mean? Last week the Premier said that 100 people were still working at Whitbourne youth detention facility and looking after only nine youth; she said it as an accusation. Who exactly was she accusing? Her government has been at the helm for ten years now. How long did her government let that go on? Why did she not work with the unions and the public service to figure out a solution sooner?

On Monday, April 15, the Premier said – she actually said this – we cannot continue to have waste and spending and extravagance and poor management. Who has been wasting the money of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador? Who has been spending? Where is the extravagance and poor management? Who has been responsible for this? Who exactly is the Premier looking to blame? This government has been the only ones at the helm for ten years. Maybe she is blaming former Premier Danny Williams. Who knows? She must be blaming someone because she said it has to stop.

For ten years now they have been running the show during years of the highest revenues this Province has ever experienced. What have they done? They have now ground to a halt. For ten years they have had no solid plan, no identifiable economic policy, and no sustainability plan. Now, even in their cuts, there is no plan. These cuts were done in panic. Even though they knew for years that there would be a slowdown in oil production, even though that was so absolutely clear, they were still in a panic. There was no plan for sustainability, no plan for the cuts.

They say that these cuts were based on many core mandate reviews. Mr. Speaker, we ask one more time, I ask again – no core mandate review could recommend some of these most reckless and ill-informed cuts. They undertook these cuts that created chaos in the public service – fundamental, essential services needed for our communities to function. They have caused devastation in the lives of the people who have lost their jobs. These are not just numbers of

positions, but people's lives with families and communities.

Removing upwards of 2,000 jobs from our economy will not stimulate prosperity. The economic effects will be felt Province-wide. What is driving this? What is happening? We are so resource rich, yet this government has presented an austerity Budget.

Again, I must say, what kind of rabbit hole have we fallen into where everything is not as it seems; where up is down and where prosperity is austerity? We are seeing it time again. We are seeing it in Europe. We are seeing it in Spain. We are seeing it in Greece. We are seeing leading economists saying that austerity plans do not lead to prosperity.

They are not finished yet. They have told us that next year they are going after Memorial University, they are going after the College of the North Atlantic, they are going after the Regional Health Authorities, and they are going after the unfunded pension liability, an unfunded pension liability that lies at their feet because they are responsible for this.

Mr. Speaker, this government has proven that they cannot govern any more; they have lost their way. They are dragging us kicking and screaming into a multi-billion dollar megaproject that no one knows if we even need it and no one knows how much it will really cost the people of Newfoundland and Labrador in the end. Guaranteed, Mr. Speaker, we will be paying for it because no one else will be paying for this.

They have sent out the message loud and clear to our young people who are wanting to serve the public that Newfoundland and Labrador is now closed for business. They have destabilized the public service. It will take in some cases years for people to settle into their new positions and learn their jobs and become proficient once again.

In a single day, Mr. Speaker, this government has put the kibosh on youth retention. Once again, this Premier herself said it so succinctly:

We cannot continue to have waste and spending and extravagance and poor management.

No, they cannot. This government itself is admitting to poor management. They have managed our wealth, the wealth of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador – they have managed our wealth poorly. Instead, they should have been focusing on how to make life better for our people and their families. They should have been providing economic stability and certainty. They should have been taking practical steps to develop a full child care and early learning program that actually meets the needs of working families.

They should have been establishing a publicly funded and administered home care program so that families could work without trying to juggle the prices that come with not sufficient help to care for an elderly parent. They should have provided the home ownership assistance program that they promised in 2011, which is not in this Budget, Mr. Speaker. They promised this. They promised the people of Newfoundland and Labrador a home ownership assistance program in 2011 and it is still not in this Budget. We will not see it at all in this Budget year. They should have been strengthening our public service rather than throwing the lives of our public employees into a complete mess.

They say they have based these cuts on the core mandate reviews. I ask this government once again to release these reviews, release the core mandate reviews that these cuts were based on. Have they done an impact analysis on the effects of the loss of all of these jobs on the economy? Have they done that? If so, release it; release this economic impact analysis that they have done.

Like the ill-conceived cuts in Justice, did they really have a plan? Did they really know what the results would be on the people of Newfoundland and Labrador by these ill-conceived cuts?

If we had all-party standing legislative committees, perhaps – I know that is not where

the Budget is set – we would have been able to help this government find its way, but we do not and they will not – this government refuses. So they have created this problem. Mr. Speaker, this government has created this problem all on their own. They have run this Province, as stated by the Premier, with waste and spending and extravagance and poor management.

They have mismanaged our fishery, a vital renewable resource that built this Province. They have neglected rural Newfoundland and Labrador; instead, now offering people money to actually leave it. They have not built a plan for healthy economic diversity. They have been addicted to oil because they do not know what else to do. We, as a Province, are not even getting the full benefit we could be getting from that rich resource.

The role, Mr. Speaker, of government is to help us achieve our hopes and our dreams, to help us as a people reach where we want to go, how we want to make sure our resources are best used. This government is now failing the people of Newfoundland and Labrador miserably. They have proven they can no longer do it. They are done. Mr. Speaker, they are without direction; they are without plan. They are in a panic mode. They have abandoned the people of this Province, and this Budget shows it.

They cannot blame a previous Administration; they are the previous Administration. They are driven by a poorly-defined ideology, not the intent to do right by the people of this Province. They have proven to be reactionary, not proactive, with the finances of the Province. To have relied almost entirely on oil revenues has been fool-hearted and short-sighted. To plan the finances of the Province based on the price of oil is akin to using an Ouija board for budgeting.

There does not appear to be any vision for prosperity. They have mismanaged any surplus we have had and have proven themselves to be very poor managers of our money. In 2008, the start of the Budget consultations, the former Minister of Finance, this is what he said, “After almost 50 years of paying out more than we have taken in, we are now projecting a surplus

for this year. Future success depends on how responsibly we utilize these revenues today.” Wise words, Mr. Speaker – wise words.

This Budget is not a Budget of prosperity, it is not a Budget of hope, and it is not a Budget of a bright future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Verge): Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources and Attorney General.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MARSHALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is my pleasure to stand here in the House today and speak to this – I think it is the sub-amendment. Basically what has happened, this is the Budget debate were the Minister of Finance has put forward a motion that this House supports the budgetary policy of the government, the Leader of the Opposition then introduced an amendment to that motion, and then there was a sub-amendment.

Now, the reason for the amendment and sub-amendment, of course, is that this will give members of the House an opportunity to speak on more than one occasion. We can now all speak on three occasions in this bill. Because it is what is known as a money bill, we now have the opportunity to speak on topics that we wish to speak about, including the Budget. We can digress from the Budget, talk about things that are important to our district, and talk about things that are of interest to us as MHAs.

Mr. Speaker, I think, since I have been in this House, this is the tenth Budget in which I have had an opportunity to speak during the debate. I have given five Budgets myself in my capacity as Minister of Finance, and I am delighted now to have an opportunity to say a few words about the Budget that my colleague, the Minister of Finance, has brought down – a Budget that is a

responsible Budget, a Budget that is an appropriate Budget for the times that we find ourselves in.

Mr. Speaker, I heard the Leader of the Opposition speak during his opportunity – I think he had three or four hours to speak on the Budget. One day he kept saying we are spending too much money. Our government spent too much money. We are spending too much money – we are spending too much money. Then the next day he criticized the government for reducing its spending. He attacked every reduction in expenditures that the government made. What is it going to be, Mr. Speaker? Are we going to be criticized for spending, but on the other side, we are criticized for not spending. What is it going to be?

That is not a responsible position, Mr. Speaker. A responsible position is to look at the economy of this Province and to do the right thing. Mr. Speaker, a number of years ago when the world economy was in what was called the great recession, what this government did is this government then stimulated the economy by spending money. It spent money on programs, spent money on infrastructure. It spent and it spent and it spent, and it did that in co-operation with every other province in the country.

That originated in a meeting of national Finance Ministers, where the Finance Ministers met and they said that every country has to stimulate their economies to try to get the world economy to get out of the great recession that it was in. Everyone agreed to do that, and we did that.

Mr. Speaker, what you have to do is that you cannot stimulate all the time. You cannot stimulate every year. What you do is that when the economy is bad and when you stimulate the economy to try to get it moving, when you stimulate the economy to try to get some growth, you incur debt to do that. When the economy comes back and when the economy starts to move now you are in a position to reduce your spending to pay off the debt you took out when the economy was bad.

You have to do what is appropriate over the business cycle. You cannot spend more money than is coming in year after year after year; no one can do that. The result of that will be bankruptcy whether you are a family, whether you are a business, whether you are a non-profit organization or whether you are a provincial government.

Mr. Speaker, what our government did that previous governments had not done is that we ran surpluses. We limited what we spent. We lived within our means. The money that is coming in and the money that is available – the money do not belong to the government. The money is the people's money; it belongs to the people of the Province. In my view, Mr. Speaker, the money should be spent on the people of the Province because they are the people who own it.

Mr. Speaker, we are here to govern. We do not have a machine in the basement of the Confederation Building or in the Sir Richard Squires Building that prints money. Only the federal government can do that; only the central bankers can do that. We have to operate this Province on the revenues that are coming into the Province on taxation, on fees, on corporate taxation, and on royalties that are paid for by the people of the Province. It is their money, and that is why I have always said in this House we have to make sure we spend the money wisely. Mr. Speaker, we have done that.

One of the things we did not do, and one of the reasons why the bond rating agencies have been giving this government credit for prudent financial management – notwithstanding the comments coming from opposite that we overspend or we spent too much money, or that the spending was unsustainable – is that we did not spend every cent coming in. We spent the bulk of it on the people because it is their money and I do not apologize for that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, the other thing we did is we did something that other governments had failed to do. They failed to put

any on the debt. In other words they borrowed when times were tough; they borrowed when times were good. They did not care. They kept racking up debt. They kept running deficits, taking out debt to finance the deficit, taking out debt to build infrastructure.

We did it differently, Mr. Speaker. The money came in and we lived within our means. The Auditor General has said, and it is in his report every year, that a government that lives within its means is a government that is running a surplus. This government, Mr. Speaker, ran six surpluses out of the last eight years, unprecedented in the history of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, we also paid down debt. We also lowered taxes to put money back in people's pockets. Instead of just taking, taking, taking from the hard-working people of the Province all the time, we left money in people's pockets so they could spend their money on things that are important to them. Mr. Speaker, we do not apologize for that. We do not have the lowest taxes in the country, and I do not want us to have the lowest taxes in the country, but we have to be competitive. We have to be competitive with other jurisdictions.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that have happened here is that we are an exporting Province. We export our products into the world economy. We do not control the price of those products, and it has been that way since the first settlers came here to fish years and years ago. The fish is sold out into the world market. It is a commodity.

The forestry, our lumber, the pulp and paper, and the newsprint are sold out into the world economy. It is a commodity. We do not control the price, we are price takers. Our agricultural products, our lumber, the iron ore from Bell Island originally and now from Labrador, and nickel, we do not control the market. It is a global economy and we are price takers.

What happened, Mr. Speaker, is that the global economy turned. Things do not stay the same. The global economy changed, and, Mr. Speaker, we have to change with it. We all know that when things are going good, they are not going to be good forever.

One of the things I used to say is, look out when things are going good for a long period of time because at some point you are going to get it right between the eyes. For the same reason, when things are going bad it is important that we not give up hope because when things are going bad, things are going to change again. Things will get better.

We have to govern our economy in accordance with good economic policy. That is what we have to do. When the economy was bad, we stimulated the economy. Mr. Speaker, this is where, when I look at the ads that NAPE is running on TV. They are saying, how come there have to be cuts in government spending when the economy is strong? Well, there is a darn good reason for that. There is a difference between the economy and the fiscal situation of the Province. There is a major difference.

If you look at our economy, if we look at that first of all, there are different parts to the economy. There is the investment sector, there is the consumer sector, there is the government sector, and there is the export sector. They are the four areas. So let's look at them.

In the investment sector, we are booming. We have businesses making capital investments. We have people building buildings. You cannot go anywhere without seeing condominiums go up and apartment buildings go up, all over the place. We have Vale. There are 5,000 people working at Vale in that project. You have people working at Bull Arm now with the Hebron Project. You have people working on the Muskrat Falls Project.

Just listen, Mr. Speaker. There are more jobs being created in this Province than at any time in our history. That is incredible. Who would have thought that today? When our government got into power ten years ago, who would have

thought that nine or ten years later we would be creating more jobs in Newfoundland and Labrador than at any time in our history?

The other thing that is happening is the jobs are well paid. Mr. Speaker, average weekly wages in this Province are for the first time in our history higher than the Canadian average. The growth in wages is second only to Alberta in terms of the rate of growth. So we have more people working and they are getting paid high salaries.

Where do we see the effects of that? We see the effects of that in housing starts. Who could believe it, after all these years of all these homes being built, last year another record in housing starts in this Province? Last year in this Province retail sales were very high. Last year auto sales, Mr. Speaker, was the highest ever in Newfoundland and Labrador. It is because people have money in their pockets and people are working.

You have the business sector booming, you have the consumer sector booming. If more people are working and they are making more money, and more businesses in the Province are selling more goods, selling more trucks, selling more retail items, obviously they are making money. If they are making money they are going to pay revenues in the form of personal income taxes and in the form of corporate income taxes to the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. Those parts of the economy are doing well. Money is coming into the government to enable the government to spend money on the people of the Province on health care and education and things that are important to the people of the Province.

Mr. Speaker, the wealthiest part of our economy is the export sector. It is the oil and gas industry. Not that we are too reliant on oil. That is the biggest part of the economy. We cannot do it based on wood pellets. We are going to try, but it is oil that has been giving the wealth. It is the minerals that have been giving the wealth because of demand coming from places like China, and coming from places like India,

and coming from places in other parts of the world.

The demand for the product was driving up the price of the product. The price of the product now is driving up profits being made by the business sector; therefore, they would pay more royalties to the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. They would pay more taxes to the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and those revenues were taken to do the things that we could do; to do things like the insulin pumps, to build new schools, to build new roads, to build new ferries. That is where it came from, but unfortunately the economy has changed. The world economy has changed.

There is a banking crisis in Europe. There is a housing crisis and a debt crisis in the United States. Those economies are stagnant. As a result of that, there is less demand coming out of Europe, less demand coming out of the US for products in China, for products in India. Their needs and their demands for the commodities that we provide – the oil, nickel, iron ore – is less demand. Less demand for our products, lower price for our products. Lower price for our products, less royalties come into our Treasury, less corporate taxes come into our Treasury. It is very simple.

Some parts of our economy are going very well. There are lots of jobs being created, lots of opportunity for the people here, but what has happened is because of the export sector, less revenue is coming into the Province. We have to do what anybody has to do when the revenue that they are earning drops. Circumstances have changed. The world economy changed. Demand for our products is lower. The price of our products is lower. Money coming into us was lower. So we have to live within our means.

Like any family, if your revenue drops, your expenditures have to drop, like any organization, like any business. It is no different for our government. We are not immune to it. We are not immune to circumstances changing in the world and we have to adapt to them. We have to live within our means, and that means reducing

our expenditures. We do not like doing it. We know the pain it causes.

When revenues are coming in and government introduces a new program, what has to happen? What government does is provide services to its people, and to provide services you have to hire people to provide those services. Mr. Speaker, when the opposite happens, when revenues drop and you cannot offer all of those services, then unfortunately people lose their jobs. That is very, very unfortunate. We know how tough it is on those who do.

It was interesting, Mr. Speaker, as I noticed people commenting on the Budget, a lot of people said the same thing. A lot of people said: Yes, you have to cut your spending. We know you have to eliminate that deficit. You cannot have a deficit every year. If you are having a deficit you now have to take steps to get rid of that deficit, which means you either reduce your spending or you raise your taxes, or you borrow, which is madness.

Mr. Speaker, everyone said the same thing. They all said: Yes, you have to reduce your spending, we know that, but don't cut us. Don't cut the things that we love. That is the problem. Tough decisions have to be made. Responsible decisions have to be made. If we do what is right now we will get our financial system back in order, and I know there is a projection by the minister that we will get there in a couple of years. Then we will be able to get on with continuing to pay down debt and continue to make investments.

Mr. Speaker, there is also a difference – I hear people saying: Oh, my God, you should not spend the money. You should not have cut that; you should cut Muskrat Falls and then you would have a surplus.

That is the dumbest thing I think anybody in this Province has ever said. We know that the investment in Muskrat Falls does not go on the income statement as an expense; it is an investment. It is an investment that will come back to the people of the Province many times over. We will get our money back. Not only

will we get our money back, it will provide the people of the Province with low energy prices, stable energy prices, which is the whole reason for the investment.

Mr. Speaker, Muskrat Falls was not an investment to export power to the rest of the world. Muskrat Falls is an investment for the people of this Province so the people of this Province will have stable, steady, reliable energy for the next fifty, sixty years, until the end of time. At least our people will be protected in that way. That was the advantage there.

I find this absolutely amazing that people would criticize the investment that this government is going to make to protect the workers at the pulp and paper mill in Corner Brook, to protect the pensioners who used to work at the pulp and paper mill in Corner Brook. We stand with those people, Mr. Speaker. We are proud to stand with this mill no matter what is said by certain people.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MARSHALL: Can you imagine if that mill went down? Can you imagine the harshness and the impact that would have on those pensioners? With an unfunded pension liability, their pensions would be reduced by 25 per cent or 30 per cent. Can you imagine the impact, the devastation that would have on those families?

We are standing with the paper mill because we have a belief and a recognition that we are not talking about saving one plant. We are not talking about saving one business. We are talking about saving a whole forestry industry which is all interconnected, the pulp and paper mill with the integrated saw mill operations. They are all interconnected.

The pulp and paper company, the logs that come into that company, the sawlogs go to the sawmills where they are harvested into lumber. There is some good news happening there; the lumber prices are up. The sawmills, of course, with their lumber, the pulp logs, they transfer to the newsprint mill. The waste from the

sawmilling operation, the bark, the chips, and the shavings also go to the pulp and paper company. That provides another stream of revenue for the integrated sawmills that helps keep them operating.

I was told by my officials that if the mill went down the sawmill operators in Central Newfoundland would go down within a month. Mr. Speaker, we are going to stand by that industry. We are going to invest in that industry with good-paying jobs for the people who work there. We are not going to abandon it like others might suggest.

I am not talking about the Official Opposition when I say it. They have stood with us, they have co-operated with us, and they will stand with us in support for the workers and the pensioners and the people who are involved in the forestry industry in Newfoundland. We are not going to let them down. We are going to stand with them, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is my second time to be able to stand and speak to Budget 2013. As the minister mentioned in his speech just a few minutes ago, I spoke at length about ten days ago, about three hours, on the Budget Speech.

Right now, if we just go back and review the numbers that were given in this year's Budget, the total revenue for 2013-2014 is a total of \$7 billion. We are anticipating or expecting or forecasting a \$563 million deficit for this year, with net expenses to be \$7.6 billion, Mr. Speaker.

In the Budget outlook it also forecasts for 2014-2015, where revenue actually will decrease

again, which is about \$6.9 billion. Then the net expenses for next year will be about \$7.6 billion, with a surplus of \$650 million.

Mr. Speaker, in the third year, which is part of the Sustainability Plan that has been mentioned by this government, in 2015-2016 it is \$7.8 billion in revenue, with net expenses of \$7.6 billion, and then forecasted to return to a surplus of \$230 million.

Mr. Speaker, as we know, over the last few years, even though those forecasts are put in place and we see a three-year forecast here, very rarely has this government ever met any of those forecasts. Indeed, all of this has to do with the pricing of commodities around oil primarily, but sometimes affected by mining as well. It is very difficult, as I have said many, many times – just the way oil is priced and how it is impacted by currency, it is very difficult to make long-term forecasts.

Mr. Speaker, I guess I want to respond to some of the comments that were made by the minister just a few minutes ago, some comments that I made about a week ago in this House about where there were some accusations of me saying that we spent too much money or overspending by this government.

I will qualify that by saying there is no question that those warnings were put out there by many people, not just me as the Leader of the Official Opposition, there were many people in this Province. I even mentioned last week about Scotiabank and their own economist who was used to create this year's Budget who they brought in for a period of time to help with putting Budget 2013 in place, Dr. Wade Locke. He was actually sending warnings, as were other economists across the country. You had people with the various editorial boards.

Many, many people had sent warnings and said that we have to get the spending of this government under control. It was not just about the overspending; it was about how you spent and the priority of spending. There was no point if you were just going to go out and spend

money and then the positions you create or the services you put in place are not affordable.

The Adult Dental Program is a perfect example of that. We put that program in place, it lasted one year, there was no planning, and the next year, what had to happen? Well, it was ratcheted back, I say, Mr. Speaker. It is about the priority of spending and when you make a decision to spend, is the money there to make that program sustainable into the future? It is about creating the long-term plan for that spending. So when we make decisions, as I say, do we have the money there and do we know with certainty that money is available in the long term?

Mr. Speaker, as I said, it is about the commitments that we make, if we can afford them, and if the money is going to be in place to sustain those programs well into the future. We found that out this year, of course, now when we have had to really cut many of our employees in the public sector as a result of not planning for those positions for the long term.

Mr. Speaker, I do want to address some of the comments about some of the projects and some of the money that has been spent to create programs by this government. There is always the accusation when you go back to past Administrations and why things were not in place, why other people had to go and borrow, and why there was less done. I will say, if people go back in and take a look at the history, there are surpluses, but they were smaller surpluses, I would add.

I can tell you, if you look at the Budgets of the past Administrations, there was not a lot of money available. We have seen Budgets of \$4 billion and less, when you look at revenue streams now at \$7 billion and more. It is quite a difference. The environment of putting a Budget in place prior to 2003 was quite different. It was a very different environment.

What that government did, I will say, is that they went out and negotiated very successfully with mining companies like Vale, Inco at the time. They successfully negotiated with and created

Hibernia, and that was based on, I will say, successive governments. Many people had their hand in that, even going back into the 1980s, of making Hibernia the success that it is. The deals were signed by Liberal governments. Terra Nova is another example. Terra Nova is a great example and it is actually producing a lot of revenue for our economy today. Of course, we also have White Rose. We have seen extensions, but without the negotiations, without those projects put in place in the beginning from 2003 to where we are today, we would not have the money to spend. We would still be dealing with \$4 billion budgets.

I challenge this government, how would you respond to a \$4 billion budget if you did not have those revenue lines that were negotiated by other Administrations? Actually, that was part of the inheritance. There was no question there was a lot of work that had to be done.

I heard a member opposite today talk about no hospitals in the Province, or where were the hospitals? I can tell you there were lots of hospitals that were built in this Province and a lot of schools that were built in this Province before 2003. As a matter of fact, if you go back in history and look in history, there was quite a bit of work that was done in this Province in the 1960s. When you look at things like the university, when you look at vocational schools and a lot of the other programs and buildings that were put in place, they were not put in place by this government, Mr. Speaker. It took successive governments to do that work.

Mr. Speaker, I want to respond for just a few minutes to the Corner Brook Pulp and Paper situation in Corner Brook. I have to say, it was disturbing to see in *The Western Star*, which is a local newspaper in Corner Brook, this week – I will read this like it is, so people understand that this is not just Opposition out there complaining about this.

This is an interview that was done by the Minister of Health and Community Services. “She said while some political parties criticize the province’s \$90-million pledge to the paper mill and would rather see it collapse, the

government doesn't agree." Mr. Speaker, I am going to tell you, I take offence to that. I really do, because it was not a fair statement.

The minister made it quite clear, political parties and made a deliberate attempt, I would say, Mr. Speaker, not to tell the full story. I think people on the West Coast, in particular the people in Corner Brook and the people in my community of Deer Lake and people in Central Newfoundland – I have spoken at great length, and there was no question across this Province. There was a backlash about how we should spend this \$90 million. It was not, I would say if you look at most of the polling across the Province, especially in the environment of this latest Budget, in this 2013 Budget. A lot of people had concerns where this money would be spent and how it would be spent.

Many people came to me in my district and said: You can't be serious, Dwight, that you would actually support giving Corner Brook Pulp and Paper \$90 million in a loan when we are seeing public sector employees being laid off, when we are seeing services cut across the Province.

Even on Saturday night at an event, I went through great length of explaining to the people in that room why it is I would be comfortable with the \$90 million loan. I made it quite clear the money needed to be protected. There needed to be a repayment provision put in place. There needed to be security put in place.

We even went out there and said security like Deer Lake Power is something that would need to be considered. Land, for instance, in communities would be something that needed to be considered. We are not here to say that we should be willy-nilly, taking a \$90 million cheque and just throwing it at a company like Corner Brook Pulp and Paper. It is not a company, I say, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, it is a forestry industry.

As the Minister of Natural Resources just clearly said, what we are doing here, or what government wants to do here – and I am not the one, as Leader of the Opposition, who should be standing here and supporting a government

investment into the forestry industry. I can tell you right now, when I see where there is an opportunity, when I see this government trying to do the right thing for an industry, well, I am going to stand up and support it because that is how I feel. I take offence to this because there was an opportunity to tell the story like it was. We are not one of those people. If there is an opportunity there to do something right for the forestry industry, well then we will support it.

I will say we need to get the loan repayment conditions clarified. We need to make sure it is secure. We need to make sure we have the proper security so that we can take it back in case there is a default position, and we need to make sure there is infrastructure put in place in that mill. That is an old mill. That mill is very old and it is quite costly to operate.

It is important that if we are going to put a sustainable and a viable mill in place, we need investment and infrastructure in that mill, I say, Mr. Speaker. We have employees and retirees throughout this Province who contribute a lot of money to the economy on the West Coast, and not only the West Coast.

The minister spoke earlier about car sales, for instance. Well, I can tell you a lot of those cars are bought by retirees and employees with Corner Brook Pulp and Paper, or Deer Lake Power, or in some of the integrated sawmills with somebody attached to the forestry industry across this Province. They make those purchases. They are making decisions to renovate their houses and make other purchases, if it is recreational or otherwise. It is part of what happens.

I am not at all interested in seeing laid off workers from a mill in Corner Brook go away or be taking a plane out of Deer lake and end up in Fort McMurray looking for work. That is not what this is all about. We have to support industry but we have to make sure that we protect our assets, which includes our financial assets.

Mr. Speaker, that is why I take offence to some of the comments that have been made here. We

are indeed concerned and protecting the taxpayers' money. We do see there is an opportunity here to make sure that industry is viable and sustainable for the long haul, and if by chance it does not happen, the money is protected. As a default, the security is in place. Our money is protected and we could get assets of Corner Brook Pulp and Paper back, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, that is the position we take on Corner Brook Pulp and Paper. It is a significant investment as I know, as you know. It is hard; it is often difficult to explain that in the current situation. On one hand here we have an industry that if it was to collapse, there would be well over 1,000 people who would be out of work and that industry would be gone forever, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I will move on and speak to some of the other issues that I see coming out of Budget 2013. I want to speak just for a minutes about the so-called 10-Year Sustainability Plan that was put in place. As I read through the 10-Year Sustainability Plan I will say when you get to 2013, you look at putting measures in place for deficit reduction. Then you look at 2014, where we would see a review of Memorial University, the College of the North Atlantic, regional health authorities and the unfunded pension liabilities, and then next year where we would return to surplus. Then in year four to ten we would see a continued focus on innovation, economic diversification and debt reduction.

When you get past year four, this 10-Year Sustainability Plan I will say, Mr. Speaker, really lacks detail. I know it can be very difficult sometimes to put yourself out there four or five year's time, but when you look at year four, that is not that far away. If we are going to be innovative and use our creativity to bring industry to this Province, I am going to say, Mr. Speaker, that has to happen right now. I really do not see, as I read through this document here, as I look through this document, where there are any specific examples of how this could happen.

I will give you an example with the College of the North Atlantic. I will go back to an example

that I have heard, I know some members of the House of Assembly have used. This is with the electronics program at the College of the North Atlantic. I would agree right now, that the numbers in that particular program are down. There has been no marketing done around that program. All of the students who come out of that program, the electronics program at the college in Corner Brook, they all get work. They end up working with companies like Nalcor and with NAV CANADA.

What I found alarming with all of this, what I found alarming and disturbing, actually, is that there has never been a meeting. There was no consultation at all with the college on how you could fix that program and on how you could get the enrolment up to twenty students a year and have sixty students in that class. The success is there. You have companies who actually come in and hire those people right from their classes. As a matter of fact, I have attended graduation ceremonies at the college when these students are not even there. Do you know why they are not there, Mr. Speaker? They are already gone to work.

It is not only the electronics program, I say, Mr. Speaker. There were lots of examples through the college system. I believe if we sat down, if we took the administrators from the college and even the instructors aside and said: How can we fix those challenges? How can we fix that? That is what the dialogue should have been. That is what the conversation should have been, with the people who are actually delivering those programs. It did not happen. How can you be actually, truly innovative and creative if you refuse to talk to the people who are engaged in the system? You cannot do it.

There has been letter after letter that has come from people around to the Premier, I say. Members opposite are saying: Well, we are not getting those. Well, I can assure you, and I have a file up in the office upstairs that I can guarantee you is growing. These are just letters that are coming in. These are not including the e-mails. There are literally thousands of e-mails that have come in.

MR. LANE: Tens of thousands.

MR. BALL: No, I am not going to say tens of thousands, I say to the Member for Mount Pearl South. It is not tens of thousands, because as you know there are not tens of thousands of students in the programs. I can guarantee you there are tens of thousands of people impacted by this.

I can give you lots of good examples of families across this Province who are being impacted by this. I can give you examples of where mothers have gone back to school and now they have come off social services income. Now they are out there working. They are out there paying taxes. They are contributing, and they are happy and proud to do so. The impact that is having on their own children, I say, and in their own communities, Mr. Speaker; their own children right now feel like they have been taken out of a trap and now they are ending up in post-secondary education. There are a lot of good news stories, Mr. Speaker.

What needed to happen was there needed to be a dialogue where you would engage those very people who were involved with the College of the North Atlantic. Then, I believe, with that level of engagement, challenge the instructors and challenge the people who were involved in the system. Show us. Help us find solutions. That is what a proper review would have done. That is how a proper review should have been done, I say, Mr. Speaker. It did not happen in this particular case, and now what we are seeing is programs cut from the College of the North Atlantic across this Province.

So, Mr. Speaker, another area that I spoke at great length in the last few weeks – and anybody who knows my background, I am certainly not someone that has been involved in the education system around the Province. I am not a teacher, not a principal, and I have not sat on a school council. I have done my volunteer time in schools, talking to many classes, including JA, for many, many years, and talking about business, talking about health care, and I have always enjoyed going into classrooms.

There are a lot of members opposite, however, who have been involved in our education system, directly involved in our education system, either by being teachers or by being principals, or maybe even some in the administration. Certainly, lots of people have been more directly involved with education than I would have been. I think if you really sat down privately, in their own history, in their past, the best decision that those educators made in their days of working in school were made when they brought people in, when they brought families in, when they brought students in, and what did they do? When they brought people in and they actually sat down and they consulted with them – which brings me to, of course, school board amalgamation.

If you go back over the history of education in our Province, if you go right back to Term 17 in 1949 as part of the Confederation with Canada. That was a put there for a reason. Even the people of the time, when we were about to enter Confederation, education was an extremely important element of what we would do as a Province in Canada.

In the 1960s – I was not very old then – I do understand that in the 1960s there was actually a Royal Commission put in place. There was a Royal Commission put in place because people were feeling that we had to change our education system. Something needed to happen. So, in the 1960s they put a Royal Commission in place to come back with recommendations on how we should change our education system, what the future of education should be, how would it look. Well, there were a number of recommendations that came out of that, as you know, and from that is where we got what has become known in our Province for many, many years, which was a denominational school system.

For many, many years, that system worked. We had the direct involvement, of course, of many churches around the Province. As a result of that commission in the 1960s, we had, as I said, the interdenominational system. Labrador is an area that we cannot exclude because there was a lot of great work that was done in Labrador.

We had Memorial University, for instance. We had vocational schools and post-secondary institutions across this Province. As a result of all of this, the education system in our Province started to come into its own.

In the 1990s, we were forced with another challenge and another commission, I might say. Because if you can remember, and I certainly remember this, the referendum around denominational education. It was at a point in our history when there was a decision that had to be made. Would we then move away from the interdenominational education and go into a fully integrated system?

As a result of the last referendum, that is exactly what happened. I can remember when those decisions were made and people tell me, who were part of Royal Commission in the 1960s, what happened is that there was a lot of consultation across this Province, that people took input from people who were going to be affected by this decision. There was a lot of public engagement. Certainly, in the 1990s we went as far to have a referendum on this. There was again a lot of debate, a lot of public discussions on this, and opportunity for feedback from the public to determine how education should look in the future.

From that, I believe there were twenty-seven interdenominational school boards at the time. We were down to ten school boards coming out of the 1990s commission. In 2000, when I have been looking at the history of the education of the Province, there was a ministerial report. It was not one that I was that familiar with, but it was done by a Dr. Williams from the university. That ministerial report, which had to do with education in the classroom, what the future would look like – guess what they did? They, too, went across the Province and had input from people from all across the Province.

MR. A. PARSONS: It seems like a trend.

MR. BALL: I agree. As my colleague from Burgeo – La Poile said, it seems like a trend. Any time you wanted to change education, any time there were changes made to the education

system in our Province, there was always consultation from the people who were directly impacted, I say, Mr. Speaker, always going out and speaking to the stakeholders. That was in the 1960s, it was in the 1990s, and again in 2000.

In 2004 we were still with ten boards and there was a decision made then to go to four boards, four English boards and one French board. I guess that was where we first saw the beginning of the school board amalgamation. Then you ask yourself the question: How smooth did that go? Was that a smooth process? All you need to do is go back to the AG's report. I think it was the AG's report of maybe 2008 or 2009, and you will see that was not a smooth transition.

As a matter of fact, the CEO of the Western School Board District at one point made a comment. The comment went something like this, and this is probably not word for word but the comment was like: Well it is like trying to retrofit a Boeing 747 while you are in full flight. That was the comment he made, it was like retrofitting a 747 in full flight. That meant this was confusing, that it was difficult to do. As a matter of fact, the AG pointed out many financial discrepancies in his report about the Western School Board.

AN HON. MEMBER: Who was it?

MR. BALL: That was the CEO, Ross Elliott, at the Western School Board. He pointed out how difficult it was. As a matter of fact, you would have to say if you are trying to retrofit a 747 in full flight, that there were problems being created. It was literally impossible. We were seeing that no one was really keeping an eye on the way some money was being spent, Mr. Speaker. The AG quite clearly pointed that out in his report.

Now we think we can actually go from four English school boards down to one and not expect to have problems. I can tell you why we are going to have a lot of problems, because we did not do what we have historically done in this Province. When we made significant changes in this Province one of the things we did, I say to

the members opposite, is we went out, we spoke to people, we engaged with people. We got feedback from people who were working in the system, who would provide solutions to those challenges. We did not do that this time.

Instead, how did we do it? How did we do it this time? What we did is say this is what we are going to do. Now we are going to put a transition team in place and you come and tell us how you do it. Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? That is not on.

What people feel is that you have told me what you are going to do; your objective is to go to one board, so why are you asking me for input now? The decision is made. That is the case with this amalgamation process, Mr. Speaker, the decision is made. It was said in Corner Brook at the school council's meeting this week. It is over and done with. Now you expect people to come in and feel that they are having meaningful consultation into a process where the decision is actually made.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there is one that I should mention, too. When you look at how this government has, even in their history, in 2008 with teacher allocations. I spoke to a number of teachers in the last week. How did that process work, I asked many of them? What happened then? What did you do in 2008 when you were talking about teacher allocations?

Do you know what they did? Do you know how they did it? They went out and got feedback. They actually asked for submissions, I say, Mr. Speaker. They went out and had consultations with people. How are we going to put proper teacher allocations in place? They knew there were changes that needed to happen. There were changes that needed to occur.

They went out, they talked to teachers, they talked to parents, and they talked to people in the system. I am sure many of the members opposite can remember that in 2008 because they were a part of that system, Mr. Speaker. They went out and they spoke to people who were going to be impacted by this. Now, this is how we got our teacher allocation.

Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of notes here on this. One of the things that came to me this weekend is when we asked for: Where is the analysis? How did you get to make this decision? Why did you think that going from four boards to one is even manageable? Who did you talk to? When you asked for it, show me the documentation that leads up to that decision because you would think this is a significant decision. Well, it is not available. We talked to people in the Department of Health but we did not really talk to anybody else.

So we went looking for this. Do you know what people are telling me? People are saying to me: Well, I can live with the decision if somebody can tell me why. If someone can show me why, well, I can buy into the argument if it makes sense. Right now, when we ask for this, the why is not answered. They do not answer that why. They will not even tell us why not. They will not show us –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BALL: – any of the information they have gathered that led up to the amalgamation of the school boards in the Province, Mr. Speaker. That is a fair question. It is a question that I ask on behalf of the people of the Province. I believe it is one that should be answered. Giving people the opportunity to feed into this transition team is not the proper way. Most people say that the decision is made or feel the decision is made, so any input right now is absolutely meaningless.

One thing, too, that I have heard is some feedback about the amalgamation of the school boards. Then when you see in the 10-Year Sustainability Plan that there is, people are asking questions. Is this really just a precursor? Is this just government tipping its toe in the water of amalgamation of the health boards? Mr. Speaker, there is something that we need not forget. When you look at the amalgamation of school boards or health boards, this is part of our history. I will say that we thought we were going to save money but that did not happen.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, if you go back to the AG's report – I do not have the exact piece of it right here now and I will get to the numbers as I move through this. I will say, Mr. Speaker, the AG himself said that this government had claimed they were going to save money. They were going to save money with the amalgamation of health boards. In actual fact, three years later, they were not even saving money. The savings were never realized. You need to be clear, there is only one way. If you are going to consider these options you must consult with people, something that this government does not do a very good job of.

Mr. Speaker, I want to speak for a minutes – I have about thirty minutes left, but there are a number of things I want to touch on. I want to touch for a minute on literacy in the Province. We have been waiting a long time for a literacy plan. I just want to give you a timeline.

Back on June 16, 2008, almost five years now, this was a comment: a discussion paper made available to facilitate input into a Strategic Adult Literacy Plan. This was in 2008. In October of the same year, in a news release the current minister at the time, who is Minister Shea, "...also noted that work continues on the development of a Strategic Adult Literacy Plan." In the fall of 2008, the work is continuing.

In Budget 2010, this was the statement: Government is committed to commencing implementation of the Strategic Adult Literacy Plan – Budget 2010, three years ago. In 2008, it was development. In 2010, implementation – the words that people were waiting for. In Budget 2010, we are going to implement the Strategic Adult Literacy Plan.

In April 2011, almost a year later, government committed to releasing the plan. So it was developing the plan in 2008; implementation in 2010; 2011, going to release the plan; February 2012, Literacy Newfoundland and Labrador went public and questioned why government had not released its plan.

So this is your association that is watching this and is waiting for this. They have been through

the development, they have heard about the implementation, they saw the budget allocation, they said they heard the statement that it was going to be released in February, and they wanted to know why. In March 2012, there were some questions asked at the time. The answer from the minister said we will look at the literacy plan, update it now –

MR. A. PARSONS: The one that never came out.

MR. BALL: The one that never came out, we are going to update it and it will be released in due time over the next fiscal year. It was developed, it was planned to be implemented, it was going to be released, it was going to be updated, and then going to be released in the fiscal year 2012-2013.

Well, the news is that it is not out and we are in 2013-2014. So, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you that this is disappointing. When you look at the situation with literacy in our Province, it is important – because literacy affects many of us and it affects a lot of people in this Province. As a matter of fact, there is a lot of information out there, I would say. When you look at the benchmarking of where we are, where we fit with other provinces, we are kind of in the middle of the pack, just a little bit below the middle of the pack.

When you look at the impact that it would have on the lives of people, when they are given the opportunity to increase their reading skills or have better reading skills, there is a direct impact on employability. It is a direct impact on health. As a matter of fact, people who have better reading skills are known to be healthier people; they are definitely known to be able to find jobs easier, I say, Mr. Speaker.

I will just give you an example here of something that came out of the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey. It says: People with lower literacy levels are more likely to be at higher health risks, an increased effect on seniors, and this relationship tends to occur at all ages. So it is just not only about seniors; it is about all ages. The employability is certainly

much higher, the wages are higher, crime is lower, and it has an impact on the labour shortages, I say, Mr. Speaker.

So, there are a lot of areas that putting proper programs in place, like the literacy strategy would do, there are reasons we need this. People go looking for this and it can make a big difference in the lives of people.

When you look at this in Newfoundland and Labrador, they are suggesting that 55 per cent are affected by this and no evidence to suggest that anything this government has done has failed to improve the statistic. It is an important statistic. It impacts the lives of many people in our Province. It has a negative impact on health. It has a negative impact to employment for the people who obviously would look forward to this.

So we will continue to be looking. We will continue to be asking questions on that. We think it is an important pillar. It is a commitment. It is a promise that has been made. I believe the minister right now and this government really needs to get on with this. Get this out there and get this done, I say, Mr. Speaker.

I want to tie this into some of the problems we are having within our Adult Basic Education. When you look at this level of investment into education, there is no question – and I am sure members opposite have seen all this, too. They have been getting this in their inboxes and in their mailboxes. People are concerned about what is going to happen in September with the ABE programs. Again, it is an example where I believe the College of the North Atlantic, when I go back to the program that is offered there and the changes that has made on the lives of literally hundreds and hundreds of people who have taken part in that program over the years, they have been very significant. We have seen lives changed and families change.

I would encourage this government – before we move on from this – why not go to the college? Why not go and look for solutions? There are compelling arguments, I say, Mr. Speaker, that

are out there. These are people who are willing to sit down and to help you address those challenges. They have solutions in place. The types of cuts in the delivery system we are seeing right now are not necessary. The money can be saved. As a matter of fact, there are a lot of people even questioning about how we have gotten to the calculations we have seen in recent days.

Mr. Speaker, we see this as an investment in education. I have talked to a number of students. As a matter of fact, a young man phoned me last night just after I got back into the city from the district. He had been through this. He had been through the program at the college. He said one of the things about all of this was that he felt like he was a part of a system where he could integrate, where he could leave his ABE program once it was established – there were supports in place for him that was easily there; he felt comfortable. What he did, in this particular case, he transitioned into another trade and he is doing quite well right now, I say Mr. Speaker.

He is another example of where the College of the North Atlantic and the ABE program that is available there has helped people not only transition and not only finish their Adult Basic Education, but they have moved on to greater things in their life, Mr. Speaker. Now they are out there, they are working and contributing to the workforce, paying good taxes, I say Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the AG in 2007 said – back to the amalgamation of the health board. I just want to finish up on this; I just found the note there. The AG, just talking about amalgamation again as we move away from the Adult Basic Education program – which I would suggest is certainly an area that we need to go back and review before we actually make this decision and move this out of the College of the North Atlantic.

Going back to the amalgamation of the school boards, and I was mentioning about the amalgamation of the health boards because there is a lot of concerns out there now and it is mentioned in the sustainability program that we

would see a review of our health authorities. Back in 2007, the AG said by the comments of the government that this amalgamation of the health boards was supposed to save \$7 million. Well, two years later there was no savings; they did not get their \$7 million. It was actually worse than that, Mr. Speaker. They were supposed to get \$7 million, but more than seven times that extra was being spent. It was \$51.8 million more that it was costing the system.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BALL: This is the reason why we caution amalgamation. We are saying make sure that the planning is in place, and the planning has not been done by this government, I say Mr. Speaker. The planning has not been done. I would not want to be thinking that just because you amalgamate programs necessarily means that you are going to save money. In this particular case, it happened in 2007, and that is not the case. That is our history. That is our experience.

Mr. Speaker, I am getting limited time here now, as time is moving on. There are a number of things that I would really like to talk about, but I am going to talk about two things. As many of you know, I have a bit of a history from spending over thirty years in some delivery of health care and I want to talk about two things that are important, I believe.

When you look at investments in health care, there are two areas in particular, and there are others. Certainly, increasing activity would be one area where we would see finding ways to promote that. It is one way that we could actually see significant savings to our health care if you wanted to make an investment.

There are two areas within our Province, Mr. Speaker, within our society that I believe if you look for the low-hanging fruit, if you had to make an investment, and the two areas would be diabetes and smoking cessation. Mr. Speaker, diabetes right now, if you look at the incidence of diabetes in our Province – when we talk about

being leaders, when we talk about leading the country in some areas, well I can guarantee you now they are not all positive.

We are not always leading the country in a positive way because diabetes is an example where we actually lead the country, Mr. Speaker. In Newfoundland we have the highest rate of diabetes in Canada, 9.3 per cent. We have about 47,000 people in our Province right now who are affected by diabetes.

There is not a member in this House, I say, today who do not know somebody, or themselves who are not affected by diabetes, and this is expected to grow. The sad thing about this is that this is expected to grow to almost 15 per cent, not by 2025 or by 2030. This is expected to grow by 20 per cent, or up to 14.4 per cent by 2020. We are expected to go from 47,000 to 73,000 people living in our Province who will be impacted by diabetes.

Mr. Speaker, I do not need to tell anybody in this room the cost that this will create to our health care system. It is time; we have to put interventions in place. We certainly need to put more focus on diabetic education. We need to look at people who are pre-exposed to diabetes right now and put in preventative measures. We have to make sure, because diabetes affects so many other areas of our health care system, from renal dialysis to amputations, where people then, of course, because of the disability, find it very difficult to get work. They find it very difficult to stay employed.

I do not know how many people the members opposite would have but I know I have quite a few in my district who have to travel on a day to day basis into Western Memorial Hospital just to receive renal dialysis. It is very difficult. It takes away from their lifestyle. A lot of those people who are on dialysis today, it is because of diabetes, Mr. Speaker. Why is it that we have so much diabetes in our Province? A lot of it has to do with the obesity rate in our Province and because of demographics.

We certainly have an older population, but 73,000 people by 2020, Mr. Speaker, I can tell

you, we have to find interventions because if not diabetes will be – my guess, and I would go out and say that diabetes will be the single largest contributor to our health care costs, because it happens. It is really from all ages. We have to make sure if it is from giving people easier access to better food, better education, getting people more involved, and even access to medications right now that are not on our benefit list.

People opposite will say: Okay, well you are asking to spend more money. Well this is the investments that we are talking about. If you invest today in better education, better medications, well then the returns are down the road. It will be less of an impact, I would say, on our health care system down the road.

Mr. Speaker, as an example, we really missed an opportunity. Diabetes, in particular, is an area where we can have a very positive influence simply by just using more technology. People with diabetes, getting them registered so that we can get to them with information, so that we can actually help them, through better education, control their diabetes.

Mr. Speaker, the incidence of diabetes in our Province is off the charts. It is an area, be it with insulin pumps or better medications or better monitoring, more activity in their lives, there is a way. We have to find a way where we can get ourselves more in line with what is happening.

The other area I said I wanted to talk briefly on, indeed, was smoking. Again, this is the most preventable cause of premature death. We still have in excess of 20 per cent of our population who are still smoking. I need not tell people in this room what the impact that has. If you think diabetes has an impact, smoking is the one area, through a smoking cessation program, where you can have an immediate impact. Why we do not treat that like we would other addictions, Mr. Speaker, is beyond me.

We have good opportunities out there with smoking cessation programs, like nicotine replacement patches and others, but people need

to be supported. People need to know that people care about this. Because if not, you add diabetes as a risk factor, you add obesity as a risk factor, you add smoking as a risk factor, Mr. Speaker, and I can tell you this has tremendous cost on our health care system.

As a matter of fact, I would say – and this I know from my own experience, given my background – that we spend a lot of money. This is not to suggest that we should not be treating cholesterol, but there is more value in treating smokers or getting people to quit smoking than it is to treating high cholesterol. You get a better return on that investment, Mr. Speaker. As with diabetes, I will say that the smoking cessation program is an investment. If we are going to be the leaders that we claim to be, this is one area that we need.

I will give you an example of where we fit, because it is nice to know as you just lower the bar. BC for instance is at 16 per cent, Ontario is at 18.6 per cent. These are stats from 2011. Alberta is kind of like where we are, at 23.3 per cent; PEI, 20 per cent and Manitoba, 20 per cent. We are at 23.2 per cent. Can you imagine the impact that would have on our health care dollars if we could take 5 per cent off that and get us down, or even if we took 7 per cent of that and got us down to where BC is in those areas?

Mr. Speaker, there is a significant amount of money to be saved within our health care system. Money that we are now spending on lung disease, on inhalers, and trying to treat chronic lung diseases, all caused largely because of smoking. When you are looking for areas of investment, I can tell you now that the low-hanging fruit in health care is definitely within diabetes and smoking.

Mr. Speaker, over the last few months we have asked some questions about where we are with CETA, the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement. There is very little information that is coming back on that. I know back in February we went to a series of meetings and we were concerned as an Opposition. One of the things we put on the agenda for that meeting was an update on the Comprehensive Economic and

Trade Agreement. Where are we as a Province on that? The potential here to have an impact on our fishery and on our health care, believe it or not, Mr. Speaker, is tremendous, and I will tell you why.

First of all, I will talk about health care, since I was just on health care with smoking and diabetes. What is happening in this agreement, one of the things that is being negotiated at the negotiating table is that you would extend the patent of certain medications. This would have a tremendous cost to health care because what you would have here is you would then see later the introduction of generics. The introduction of generics to the system would be delayed. I have seen estimates up into as much as \$800 million, \$900 million, the impact that would have if this was to go through, if indeed the European countries got their way and had the extension on patents.

Mr. Speaker, we are not hearing anything from this government. On the other hand, Quebec has gone out and they have got directly involved. So, what we need to see is easier access to generics, which really in the long run lowers the costs of medications.

The fishery is another area because what they want to see is the removal of tariffs, for instance, on species like shrimp and on and on it goes. Yet again, this government has been silent on this. Much of the financial benefits, they are merely assertions because we do not have the information, and they are not proven. So, Mr. Speaker, when we met I can tell you now that we left our meeting and I was not very comfortable in knowing that CETA would indeed truly bring any benefits at all to this Province. I would say that this government needs to get more involved. It needs to get more engaged on this, because this can have serious implications for our Province.

Mr. Speaker, one of the things that came up last week in the House of Assembly had to do, again, with healthcare – and I brought it up in the House today; it was about the length of stay. I will bring this back to the hospital in Corner Brook. In the last week there was a comment

made by the City of Hamilton when we asked about the provision of services. There was a comparison made between the City of Hamilton and what we have here in the Province.

Well, just to go back to that, because I think there was a point made. What we have here is 114 community clinic, twenty-two community health centres, and twenty long-term care for 500,000 people. The comment was made by the minister that Hamilton, a city with the same population, really has three hospitals. The big difference, though, that was left out of this is that Hamilton really covers an area of 1,138 square kilometres – guess where we are, Mr. Speaker? Guess where we are in comparison?

If you really think, you really believe that three hospitals in this area would cover 373,872 square kilometres of land, that is 32,753 per cent larger than the City of Hamilton – when we challenge government what we always say is let us make sure that we actually comparing, as they say, apples with apples and oranges with oranges. This is the reason why we will continue to ask about the hospital in Corner Brook and about how we can actually improve the system with length of stay. There is no question if you can get people out of the hospital earlier you will save money, but you cannot do that without putting in place the proper community infrastructure, things like health care, things like physiotherapy, and family caregivers. We have heard about that and we understand it is going to happen very, very soon. It is in this year's Budget.

If you are really seriously going to address length of stay, the community programs must be in place. As I said, you have to have dependable home care services in place. That would either be through the traditional way or with family caregivers, community nursing, or physiotherapy. We know the demographics are aging. If you are seriously going to look at this, then you need to put the community infrastructure in place.

With the hospital in Corner Brook, it was mentioned in that same press release that I mentioned earlier the new hospital would have

138 beds. Of the 260, 138 of the beds would be acute care. Of course, this is down from what we have on the West Coast right now.

Mr. Speaker, if you are going to solve this problem, if this problem is going to be solved simply by changing the length of stay or reducing the length of stay, I say you need to drive around that area for a few days. I can assure you in a lot of the areas on the West Coast that are actually serviced by Western Memorial Hospital, those community infrastructures and those community supports are not in place.

We need to stay away from where we were. I am going to read you a comment right from the press release that was done in 2010, Mr. Speaker. This was from the Minister of Finance of the day. It goes on to say, "...despite the brand new long-term care facility and the additional dementia units built in Corner Brook just a few years ago, 25 per cent of the acute beds at Western Memorial were still being taken up by long-term care patients." The minister went on to say, "He believes the new approach to the regional hospital will help alleviate that problem."

There is the key point I want to say right here, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about reducing the number of acute care beds, this one particular comment right here by the minister. The Minister of Finance of the day said, "We saw what happened with long-term care years ago when a mistake was made and we saw the extra costs involved to correct that... If something like that happened with a facility of this magnitude, look at the taxes people would have to pay to correct it."

When I am talking about rightsizing, when we talk about downsizing the acute care needs of the people in Western Newfoundland, when we talk about a world-class hospital, I say, Mr. Speaker, we need to be sure because 132 acute care beds, taking acute care beds out of that hospital right now, we need to be very, very careful. I can assure you, if you are going to solve that problem with length of stay, reducing length of stay, the community infrastructure in

terms of long-term care, physiotherapy and all of the things that lead to readmission, if those supports are not in place you will not get the reduction in length of stay that you are projecting to have. Indeed, you will go back –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BALL: – right to what the minister has said that the mistakes we have made will be very, very costly, I say, Mr. Speaker, to correct.

Mr. Speaker, I have not talked at all on the workplace health and safety commission and the review board. This was something that I wanted to bring up. I have a minute or two. I can tell you now, the review board itself, we are seeing a trend that is going in the wrong direction. We are seeing that since 2007 the caseloads are increasing. We are seeing the decisions rendered continuing to fall. We went from 275 decisions in 2007 down to just 169 in 2012, and the caseload from 2007 to 2012 went from 440 to 540. We are seeing cases waiting for decisions. We are seeing that being increased. The number of decisions waiting to heard in 2007 was eighty-three; in 2012, 253 cases, Mr. Speaker.

I can tell you with the review board right now that is currently in place all of the trends are going in the wrong direction. This needs intervention, I say, Mr. Speaker. They have been committed to doing this, committed to putting people in place, but indeed, we are not seeing the impact of having those people available.

Mr. Speaker, there are so many other things that I could talk about in Budget 2013. As we go around the Province, as we speak to families and as we speak to people who are involved in the health care system, speaking to people involved in the education system, there is an awful lot of concern, a lot of concern from people, Mr. Speaker. They are looking at this and they are saying that if indeed we live in that Province that is supposed to be the best of times, why is it that we are seeing people who are being laid off?

Why is it that we are seeing people given pink slips?

Mr. Speaker, here is one reason for that. The only reason for that is that there has been no planning, there has been mismanagement, there has been no priority allocation to the spending, and there has been comment after comment after comment. I can tell you right now that if we do not get back to proper planning – when we put positions in place we need to know that we can keep those people in career positions, that they could be there for the long term – I can tell you we will be in a situation again long before the 10-Year Sustainability Plan ever sees the light of day.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to conclude my remarks on Budget 2013. It has been an hour now. As I said, I think I started out last Monday talking about the five things that this government felt you needed to know. Well, I can tell you, sprinkled throughout this Budget there are lots of things that are not mentioned on this one particular pamphlet right here. There are lots of things people do need to know. We will continue to debate on that and we will continue to ask questions on behalf of the people of this Province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Seeing there are no further speakers to the sub-amendment, the House will now vote on the sub-amendment as put forward by the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

All those in favour of the sub-amendment, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: All those against the sub-amendment, 'nay'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

MR. SPEAKER: The sub-amendment has been defeated.

On motion, sub-amendment defeated.

MR. SPEAKER: We will now go back to debating the amendment as put forward by the Leader of the Official Opposition.

I recognize the Member for Humber West.

MR. GRANTER: Mr. Speaker, it is always a pleasure to stand in this hon. House, the people's House, and to address the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, and in particular the good people of the District of Humber West.

I want to take some time this afternoon, and the time that is allotted to me to speak about this Province, from where we have come. I have always believed, Mr. Speaker, that in order to know where we are we must first and foremost know from whence we have come. From where we are today we can blaze a path into the future, a future that has hope, a future of prosperity, a future about this place we love, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, memory is a wonderful thing. It is critically important to be able to use our memory to place things into the proper categories and put things in the proper perspective, Mr. Speaker. I will take some time to talk investments. I will take some time to be retrospective on my region of the Province in Western Newfoundland, and my District of Humber West. I will always take some time to talk leadership, Mr. Speaker, and how important a role that is.

Mr. Speaker, we are in a much better place today than we were in 2003. I have travelled this Province extensively over the past number of years and have travelled nearly every region, as many of the people in this House have done. I see that in all regions of the Province, Mr. Speaker, we are all in a better place, but I want to put it all into perspective.

Mr. Speaker, I am not going to stand here and talk blame. I am not going to stand here and judge previous governments and political parties because of the economic woes of the past thirty

years. For those who know me, they will say that I am not that kind of person. There is no benefit for me to stand here and act just like that. What I can say to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker, and can say with a great deal of authority, is that we have made tremendous strides in the economic and social fabric, and economic and social advancement of all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians over the last ten years.

Mr. Speaker, we must look at this Province in its entirety. We cannot just simply break the Province up into regions and say that the Avalon Peninsula is the only region benefiting from the oil development and that Labrador West, for example, is the only region benefiting from mineral exploration and development. Mr. Speaker, to say such things is absolute foolishness.

Every single region, every single town, Mr. Speaker, every single person in Newfoundland and Labrador has benefited in some way, and I stress that, has benefited in some way from the economic decisions and social decisions of this government. That is simply the truth. It cannot be denied with any real source of fact.

This government, unlike past governments – and I said I would not blame past governments, and I will not. This government has been able to secure, as we all know, resource developments after sometimes hard negotiations, Mr. Speaker, from this Premier in her capacity today and her past capacity as Minister of Natural Resources and other portfolios. This Premier can stand firm and be strong in relation to negotiating with multi-international companies. She has not only talked the talk, Mr. Speaker, this Premier, our Premier, has walked the walk.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. GRANTER: Not only that, Mr. Speaker, she has delivered for the people of this Province with excellent benefit agreements and enhanced benefit agreements as well, including women in the skilled trades. She was instrumental in gender diversity agreements that opened the lucrative offshore sector to women and other

under-represented groups in our Province. We have been able to secure rich and enhanced agreements with companies that have seen the coffers of government expand such that we can help the people of this Province. That is an undisputed fact, Mr. Speaker.

This Premier, Mr. Speaker, was there as Natural Resources Minister when we laid the foundation for our Energy Plan. She was not only there, the Premier, as she is doing today with her Atlantic counterparts, is espousing an energy vision. Yes, an energy vision, not only for this Province but for the entire country, and indeed the region of Atlantic Canada.

Mr. Speaker, as I have said in this House before, I have spent nearly a quarter-of-a-century in leadership positions in one role or another. I have learned a lot over the years in leadership, both at the day-to-day operations and also at study and research as well. I wanted to say to the people of this Province, that leading in good times do not show the true leadership characteristics. Real characteristics of leadership, Mr. Speaker, are in times of challenge and when the waters are rough.

Mr. Speaker, governments by its characteristics are builders, and Opposition parties are viewers and critics. That is the very nature of the system. You get to build when you are in government, and you get to view and critique when you are in Opposition.

This government, Mr. Speaker, has over the past number of years built up this Province and reduced debt in doing so. For example, it is easy to be a critic when talking about the economy. The fact remains that more people are working in Newfoundland and Labrador, as I said a number of times today, than ever before in our history.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. GRANTER: Last year alone, Mr. Speaker, the employment growth was second only to the Province of Alberta. That is something that was only a dream just a few years ago, but with

sound investments and agreements from this government, that dream has become a reality.

Mr. Speaker, I get amazed every time I drive around the yard downtown that holds all of the automobiles. I do the same when I drive in downtown Corner Brook, amazed with all of the automobiles that are coming into the Province. When you look at all the new dealerships that have started as you drive through St. John's and around the Province. People are buying new cars, people are spending money. The economy is strong and the economy is good.

Mr. Speaker, consumer spending is up. People are buying those cars and trucks, ATVs, mobile homes, motorcycles, boats, trailers, and other vehicles. Housing starts are up, capital investment is up, and personal income is up. Mr. Speaker, this government made a principled leadership decision to put a half billion dollars a year back into the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. It is a half billion dollars that people have to spend today that they did not have to spend ten years ago.

Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, I have travelled this Province because it is something I like to do. Even before politics, I travelled this Province extensively. When you consider industrial developments taking place on the Island and in Labrador like Muskrat Falls, Voisey's Bay, Labrador West and other mining interests on the Island, we are seeing growth in small and medium-sized businesses in all regions because of the larger developments and spin-off services like these, Mr. Speaker.

When I see all this growth, especially investments that are long term, I believe that our future is bright in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. GRANTER: Mr. Speaker, I believe that the people of this Province see a bright future in this Province as we move forward. Our investments in education at the primary, secondary, and post-secondary level will promote success for all of our people. Some of the lowest tuition rates in the country was and is

a solid investment in our present and future generations. There is no disputing that fact. Our commitment in educational infrastructure over the past few years has been second to none.

I was glad to have been joined with the Minister of Education and the Minister of Natural Resources last Friday to announce the awarding of a \$12 million contract for the redevelopment of the former Regina site in Corner Brook, Mr. Speaker, to a junior high intermediate high school, which will have a new gymnasium, a new fitness centre, multi-purpose lunchroom, as well as library upgrades, family living upgrades, art room upgrades, computer lab upgrades, science lab upgrades, and a skills trades applied technology suite. Extensive upgrades to the exterior and mechanical and electrical systems, including energy-efficient lighting, as well will be a part of that multi-million dollar contribution.

Mr. Speaker, that was a promise I made, that was a promise that Minister Marshall made, it was a promise that this government made, and it is a promise that this government is delivering on.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. GRANTER: Mr. Speaker, I can speak to that because I was a part of the redevelopment of the former Corner Brook Regional High school, which saw a \$20 million-plus investment into that facility as well just a few short years ago. Again, a promise made, a promise kept for the students, for the parents, and the community of Corner Brook.

This is what the people have come to know in Corner Brook. It is the trend of promises made and promises kept. Mr. Speaker, a trend I and this government intend to continue. The people on the streets of Corner Brook know, understand, and respect the support this government has shown the entire region over the last number of years.

Mr. Speaker, when this government took office it inherited a significant deficit, both from the financial and infrastructure perspective. As an

educator, in those days I could speak ad nauseam to that. In fact, Hansard will show that I have spoken to that very fact in this very House.

Since coming to office, Mr. Speaker, this government, under strong principled leader as its core, has made smart, strategic investments to address these deficits. I believe, as do people believe in this Province believe, that these investments have strengthened all of our communities and regions throughout the Province.

Mr. Speaker, I do not have to stand here and spout off the value of these investments because I am on this side of the House. These investments have been touted as being strong by others, not only in this Province but across the country and internationally. Mark Carney, as an example, head of the Bank of Canada and soon to be head of the Bank of England said that Newfoundland and Labrador is a model, and others have spoken to that very point both in Canada and internationally as well, Mr. Speaker.

Billions have been invested in roadwork in all regions of the Province. I remember driving the Northern Peninsula a decade or so ago. I spent a lot of time going up and down the coast. I remember just trying to weave back and forth the holes and the ruts in the road and having to stay away from some of the tourists and trailers that were being pulled and the campers that were being pulled. There have been significant investments that have taken place on the Northern Peninsula, and indeed around this Province, Mr. Speaker.

We have invested in new educational facilities like the ones I mentioned earlier, new hospitals, and yes, I am proud to be part of a government that will deliver a new health facility to the people of the Western Region and indeed Corner Brook. With a pre-Budget announcement of hundreds of millions of dollars, I am looking forward to that very day, Mr. Speaker.

I want to take a few moments to speak to the people of my district and, for that matter, the people of Corner Brook and the West Coast. If

there is a theme that runs through my message always it would be this: a promise made, a promise kept; a promise made is a debt unpaid.

I said to someone on Twitter a few weeks ago, because I felt memories were running a little shady: Go to the top of University Drive, take a notebook and paper and start to walk – take you on a visual journey. I say to my constituents in Humber West, in Corner Brook and the region, let's take a visual journey together in the next few minutes that I have left.

Start with the millions invested in the long-term care facility; write that in your notebook. Walk a few hundred yards and look to your left and write down the millions on the new student residence at Grenfell Campus, Memorial University that will advance student and regular housing in Corner Brook. Before you leave campus on this visual journey, take a shortcut through the building and walk through the millions invested in the new Arts and Administration Building; and before you leave, go around the corner and write down on your booklet the millions invested for the new science labs that are currently under construction.

Do not leave campus just yet on our visual journey – do not leave campus just yet. Sit and chat with some students, both local and those from other provinces, and indeed, foreign students, and ask them why they have come to Newfoundland and Labrador, and they will generate a list of why they came to Newfoundland and Labrador. Somewhere on that list you will find that it is because of some of the lowest tuitions that we have in the country. That is why they came to Grenfell Campus of Memorial University of Newfoundland.

A couple of hundred yards down the hill, look to your left and add another \$20 million invested in Corner Brook Regional High. Continue your journey, look to your right and add up the millions invested in the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary in infrastructure, equipment, and programs – a new child exploitation division in Corner Brook in last year's Budget, Mr. Speaker.

A warning now, if you are blurred with all of the spending, be careful going through the lights at the bottom of the hill because some people do run the yellow lights. Mr. Speaker, continue down Mount Bernard Avenue and add up the millions invested in the new courthouse. A little further along to your left, you can go look at the new sod-turning for the \$12 million redevelopment of Regina that we promised, that we are delivering on, and that we announced this past Friday.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. GRANTER: Mr. Speaker, do not pass the old Canadian Tire Building on Herald Avenue without having a look at the state-of-the-art eye care centre, with state-of-the-art equipment and fabulous health care workers.

If you have enough time or room on your paper, you could add on the millions invested in Margaret Bowater Park in Corner Brook, the curling rink a little further up the hill, the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing building, the treatment and addictions centre, and yes, the monies contributed for the new city hall. I nearly forgot the water treatment facility, Mr. Speaker, now under construction as you drive out the Trans-Canada Highway. Oh yes, I forgot Summit Place up on the Heights, and the seniors' apartments on West Street attached to the United Church, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Corner Brook, the people of the region, are very keen people. They know and understand the support that this government has given them over the last ten years. They know where the support has come from, Mr. Speaker, like the investment in the forestry industry that the Minister of Natural Resources and the Premier spoke highly about a week or two ago, \$90 million for the industry. Drive out the highway to Steady Brook and see the levels of capital and operational investment in Marble Mountain, as well as Blow Me Down cross-country investments this past winter as they prepare for games in 2014 and 2016.

The people of the region have seen nearly \$38 million for new and replacement medical

equipment. I know the Minister of Health can talk to that. Minister Sullivan was in Corner Brook last week. She spoke of the \$20 million invested for infrastructure upgrades, including Western Memorial air heating units, and recently another \$2 million awarded for a new restorative care unit at the Corner Brook long-term care facility.

The people of Corner Brook, Mr. Speaker, are proud of the investments made by this government, and I am proud to be a part of those investments. They have contributed significantly to the economic success experienced in the region as well as the entire Province. The people of Corner Brook, when I speak to them every day, know and understand what I mean when I say promise made, promise kept. That is what they have come to hear, that is what they have seen over the last ten years.

That is what the Minister of Natural Resources and myself, on a daily basis, work with Cabinet and work with the Premier to deliver for the people of Corner Brook. That is where our commitment is. That is why it is strong. That is what we are going to continue to do. This government is a positive government, Mr. Speaker, and we have a bright and prosperous future ahead of us.

Some people might ask where we are today, Mr. Speaker. Responsible management of the Province's finances has been a cornerstone of this Administration's mandate. The Minister of Natural Resources spoke to that earlier today. When we go through tough times we invest, and we invest heavily as we did over the last number of years. Now, Mr. Speaker, we have to rein in some of our spending.

As Minister Kennedy has stated, the revenue generated through the growth of our economy does not offset the losses, as he said earlier, from declining revenues from our natural resources. We are not alone in facing those challenges, Mr. Speaker. All provinces in this country, indeed all regions of this country – and we know of the disastrous impact it has had in some of the countries of the world.

The Auditor General confirmed the seriousness of our financial situation in his report earlier this year when he stated that our expenses are the highest in Canada. With uncertainty in commodity prices, steps need to be taken. This government is taking the steps to that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as I conclude, and I will get an opportunity to speak again to the Budget in the days ahead, I want to say to the people of Corner Brook that our commitment has never been stronger.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Littlejohn): The hon. the Member for Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

I am quite pleased to be able to stand again and speak to the Budget that is before us in this House of Assembly. Of course, right now we are speaking to the second part of our debate, which is the non-confidence motion. We finished the sub-amendment that was put forward by the Leader of the Official Opposition one speaker ago. Now, so people watching us will know what is happening, we are into the non-confidence motion. Each of us, once again, gets a chance to speak to the Budget.

What I would like to do today, Mr. Speaker, and what I am going to do today is concentrate somewhat on my district. The first time I spoke to the Budget, I spoke to the larger picture of the Budget. I will get a third moment to speak before the debate is over and I am going to speak to that larger picture again, especially in my role as leader of our party.

Today, I want to focus somewhat on my district, on people in my district, on things that I hear from people in my district, and bring those issues here to the House of Assembly. Of

course, these are the people who voted for me. These are the people who put their faith in me. I want them to know that I am listening to them and that I do have their thoughts here with me. I do have their interests in mind and I want to bring those interests here to the House.

I am particularly going to refer to things that I heard from a town hall in my district just a couple of weeks ago, a town hall that was well attended and really had quite a variety of people at it, Mr. Speaker. We had people from mixed economic backgrounds. We had people in the room from a mixed background in terms of ability. We had new Canadians in the room as well. We had quite a variety of people. What it represents, of course, is the makeup of my district.

It is a very interesting district, Mr. Speaker. It is a district that has everything from an economic perspective in it, everything from people who are millionaires, right through to people who are Income Support. I guess a lot of the districts are like that, mine certainly is.

One of the things that strikes me about my district, Mr. Speaker, and it certainly came out in the town hall, was how people are aware of the issues. I was struck at the town hall by the fact that people who themselves were not comfortable, people who themselves were not in need and were not wanting, that they could come to that meeting and speak about the concerns they have.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi.

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

What I was talking about was the fact that people who came to the town hall did not come necessarily to represent their own needs, but came to speak, to listen, and to reflect back what they see in the district, their concern for people

who do not have adequate housing. While they themselves, a lot of the people who spoke have adequate housing, they see in the district people who are in need. They came and wanted to talk about that.

I want to talk about that a bit, Mr. Speaker. It is extremely moving when you go into a room and see people who do not have to be there standing up and being concerned about their neighbours. I had people who were at that town hall who wanted to talk about the fact that they themselves help others who do not have good housing.

There was a student at the town hall, Mr. Speaker, and he talked about the fact that he was lucky he was from outside of St. John's but his parents owned property in the city. He was lucky because he was able to stay in an apartment in a house that was owned by his parents. They do not live here but he was able to stay there.

He talked about having to give food to fellow students who could not afford to feed themselves and having to sometimes offer a couch for students to sleep on because they cannot find affordable housing. His concern was for his fellow students, people his own age. As he put it, they just cannot afford to pay their tuition, to feed themselves and to also put a roof over their heads.

He was happy as another student to help them but his message was, this should not be the way that it is. They should not be there in the university or at the College of the North Atlantic unable to take care of themselves. Where is the housing? Where are the supports for students? That was his message, and he was reflecting people who live in my district.

Somebody else who spoke, Mr. Speaker - there were quite a number of people who spoke that night - somebody else talked about his concern that here in the Province right now, while things are going well, the share is not happening equally. People are not getting a fair share in the Province right now. His concern was that while he was doing okay - he was sixty-one, he gave

his age. He has a job and he is doing okay. He was looking around him and seeing people who were not doing okay. What he wanted me to know was that this really upsets him, this bothers him. This is the reality of my district.

Somebody else who stood, Mr. Speaker, and again, this person came from the university setting, teaches at the university. Certainly is comfortable and has a job, even though it is not a permanent job, I think, and has skills and the ability to get other jobs, again, talked about the concern for people in the district. This person spoke in particular about our arts community. In my district, of course, I have a very large arts community.

This person talked about how the government needs to be looking at all of our resources and when we talk about our natural resources, we should not only be thinking about oil and gas, mining and forestry, that we should also be thinking about the people. One of the groups of people this person mentioned was our thriving arts community, and how investment in arts and investment in the people who are in the arts community is just as important an investment as investment in oil or investment in energy, or investment in forestry.

Again, I bring that message here to the government. I bring that message to my colleagues here in this House. This person was saying, and I absolutely believe it, that when we put money into people that is just as important an investment as putting money into the development of any other natural resource, that people are a natural resource.

When we are putting money into the education of people, when we are putting money into people becoming more skilled in their trade, whether that trade is a trade that involves welding, for example, or whether their trade is in the arts community, because that is a trade. In the days of apprenticeships, artists apprentice. In the days in England where apprenticeships were so important, actors apprentice.

Artists of various kinds apprentice. So, investing money into people who are then going

to go out and not just entertain us or help us see the beauty of life, but also put more money into our economy. That is an investment that is important. That was an issue that came up in my town hall, something that was presented by one of the speakers at the town hall.

One of the things that really struck me was we had some people at the town hall who are retired, retired teachers some of them, and retired from other professions as well. They volunteer in some of the centres in my district. In my district there are a number of places, for the most part run by religious groups, where they try to meet the needs of people who are living in bordering houses. People who do not have enough money to feed themselves well, and people who, along with that, are also lonely; people who spend a lot of time on the street because they really do not have a comfortable home to go into.

Some of these places, one is Gathering Place, for example, on Military Road. I know that St. Thomas's Church down at the very east end of Military Road does have some meals for people. I know that Gower Street United Church also does that. Some of these people came to my town hall. They are all in my district. As I said, I have everything in my district from people who are millionaires, right through to people who need the services that these churches offer.

One of the volunteers who came was so upset about, during this past winter, having come across five people who were sleeping and basically living under a bridge. They were men and women; one woman, I think, and four men. They would huddle together this winter and sleep under a bridge because they had no other place to sleep.

They would go to whatever food is available in the downtown, to the different food banks, to the lunches that are served, to the kitchens that are available. We have quite a number in downtown now. Twenty years ago that did not exist in St. John's. Now I can name – I named off some of them already. I know George Street United Church also feeds people. The Salvation Army feeds people.

All of our downtown, we are the way large cities are now. We have these soup kitchens all over the place in the downtown, and quite a number are in my district. What I am doing today is I think letting maybe some of my colleagues across the way know something that they may not know. They may not be aware of the fact of how many soup kitchens feeding people regularly are here in the downtown.

The building that was the school I went to, that is what happens in that building now, where Gathering Place is. The volunteer who came and spoke was somebody who actually volunteers at Gathering Place. She talked about these people living under the bridge. She talked about how one night when she met the women she said to her: Look, I am going to pay for you to go to a hotel tonight just so you can get a shower and freshen up. I want you to have a nice meal. That is only a Band-Aid, and this person knew that was only a Band-Aid. She said: What are we doing for people?

There was another story that was brought to me that night, too, Mr. Speaker, the story of somebody who, overnight, no longer had a place to live in the city through no fault of his own. He was over sixty-five. He went around to all the different places that offer short-term accommodation, but he could not get that accommodation because they do not take people over sixty-five.

This person who was telling that story was so concerned about the fact, well she herself was over sixty-five, and she said: What makes sixty-five a magic age that if we are in need there is nobody who is going to take care of us any more? If somebody is in need, and somebody overnight could be thrown out on the street and then not be able to find a place to stay because he was over sixty-five. That issue was brought.

One of the things that was said by the person who was the volunteer from Gathering Place, she was so upset that we are not a Province – as she put it, we are not a have Province for the poor in our city. We are not there for the poor. The first man who spoke that night said the same

thing. We are not taking care of people. People are not getting a fair share.

That is what we have a responsibility to do, Mr. Speaker. We have a responsibility to make sure that programs are in place so that if people, whether permanently or temporarily, are in such dire straits, that in actual fact we can stop that from happening. That people not be in dire straits.

One of the things that governments have a habit of doing is expecting the not-for-profit sector, expecting volunteers to pick up the slack when the system does not work for people, and that has been our history. That has been the history of North America, picking up the slack when government is not doing what it should be doing.

What we need, and it came out very clearly the night at my town hall, Mr. Speaker, it was addressed a number of times, was the need for adequate housing. I know from the travelling I have done around the Province that need for people in the larger centres is not just here in St. John's.

We have people couch surfing and living on the street. It does not mean they are there every night, but we have that happening in Corner Brook. We have that happening in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. We have that happening in Labrador City. It is happening everywhere in the Province where we have larger centres.

The government does not seem to be taking it for granted the fact – this is what? I am in my seventh year now in this House of Assembly and I know that I, and since I have had a caucus with me, my caucus, we have been talking about the need for accessible housing, housing that is affordable, the need for a housing plan, and the need to make sure that everybody has the ability to have a roof over their head, Mr. Speaker.

Once again, we have a Budget that does not recognize that issue. It does not recognize that issue at all. Newfoundland and Labrador Housing is doing what it can do with the money that is given to it, but they can only work with

the money that is given to it. This government has to have a plan. We need so much more social housing. We need so much more housing that will ensure that people can afford to have a roof over their head. It should not depend only on not-for-profit groups and volunteer groups accessing programs and making it happen with government's help.

We need more new money put into housing, Mr. Speaker. Of all the issues that came out the night of my town hall, that was probably the one that was the loudest, the concern that people do not have enough money and cannot afford to pay for the rent that is there.

One of the women who spoke who lives in the downtown – I know exactly where she lives – spoke about her real concerns. She herself has been able to improve her life. She now does have a very nice place where she lives and she volunteers with Stella's Circle. She does not have a lot, but she considers herself so much better off than those who cannot even afford the kind of small apartment she has herself.

The concerns she brought forward, Mr. Speaker, for example, the fact that we do have slum landlords in this city and we do not really have regulations to get at slum landlords; the fact that our rents have gone up, not just here but in all the centres I have mentioned already, that rents have gone up astronomically and that is why people cannot afford in an apartment or even a boarding house, that people are on the street because of the astronomical rents.

She was just so concerned about illiteracy among the people that she meets on a regular basis. She was concerned about the fact how they are cut off because they cannot even afford a cellphone because cellphones are so expensive, yet we do not have regulations around that.

She talked about the fact – and I can hear her now – that the cost of food is going up. The cost of rent is going up. Everything in the city is going up. If you are on Income Support, that is not going up and if you are on minimum wage, that is not going up. Yes, the government made some steps a few years ago and brought the

minimum wage up to \$10, but that was not even adequate when it happened and there is no talk by this government at this moment of changing that. Yet, we know how much the cost of living has gone up in the Province in general, but particularly, here in St. John's. It has gone up in the other centres also, like in Corner Brook and like in Labrador City.

Mr. Speaker, what I am doing here today is bringing forward the reality of people who live in my district. I am doing it because I do not think we are in touch with that reality here in this room very often in the way decisions are made.

One man stood and he listed it all off. He said: This is what we need. We need accessible dental care, we need accessible home care, universal home care, we need universal pharmacare, we need full-time kindergarten, and we need accessible housing – I did not make this up; this was his list – we need transportation for everybody, we need assistant devices programs, and we need adequate mental health care. Those are the things that people need, and this government has got start using its money and doing its planning so that those needs get taken care of, so that people come first in this Province, that we understand –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MS MICHAEL: Yes, people do need and that is what we have to learn; people do need and we have to meet their needs. I am sick and tired of being made fun of in this House when we talk about the needs of people.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to be able to speak to the Budget. I have had the

honour of being part of the last thirty Budgets as part of my life in the public service.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BRAZIL: Mr. Speaker, while I know there are some hard decisions that have to be made, I am very pleased to be able to speak to this Budget. I see a lot of warrants to the positive things that are coming out of here.

While the member of the Third Party might note that yes, indeed people need a lot of things, this Budget has a lot of things for a lot of people, and addresses a lot of needs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Having a social conscience is not only warranted to the NDP or the Liberal Party. This party over here, the people in this caucus, and I guarantee you our Premier has a social conscience. You can see that in the programs and services that we are offering in the \$8 billion Budget that we put forward this year. We have made sure that we looked at all the things that are responsible.

I have been part of Budgets that have been slash and cut across the boards. Sometimes they are warranted; sometimes they were not. I have been with those that are all tax increases. Not a lot of leadership there when you can just with the tick of a pen increase taxes. I have been there when there have been fee increases across the board, sometimes to the hardship of individuals being involved. I have been there when there have been major layoffs, Mr. Speaker.

I know, Mr. Speaker, you have been part of my process too where you were laid off and where you were bumped out by certain people. You go through the process and you do realize sometimes decisions have to be made. They are not easy to swallow, and nobody has more sympathy to people who have been through it than I do. I know from my colleagues here from

the discussions we had, we have sympathy for people. We try to lessen the burden on people.

The difference between what we are going through now and when I went through it and, Mr. Speaker, when you faced it, is that the economy is robust out there. We have done things properly where we have companies, multinationals, and the private sector to invest back in this Province so there are more opportunities for people and there are more doors open. When one door closes, a window opens for people. We try to support that transition, and we have done that through the programs and services. We want to continue how we do that by the programs and services we have offered here.

Mr. Speaker, I have to note when you look at putting a Budget in place and running a government, you have to be fiscally responsible. That is one thing we definitely are. We had to assess where we were. Do we want to run further deficits? Do we want to borrow? Do we want to jeopardize our bond rating where we are paying interest out to international companies that could be better used for health care, for education, and for helping people who have specific needs? That is why we made some decisions, to make sure that there is an even balance here and we will look at that.

You have to have vision. It cannot be about the next fiscal. It cannot be about the end of your term in the next election. It cannot be about the next generation; it has to be multi-generational. You have to look at that you have covered all the bases as you do it. You make sure that you are covered for the next fiscal and things run properly. You have to make sure by the next election, whatever Administration is in there, that they inherit something that is workable. You have to make sure that the next generations and the following generations have something to look forward to, and a higher standard of living, and know that they can rely, that we are not burdening them with a debt. Mr. Speaker, we have that vision and that is reflective in this Budget here.

Responsibility: We have to be responsible to the taxpayers. We have to be responsible for what we have, and where we are going. We have to make sure that we assess the needs of people out there and deliver on those needs. We have done that in this Budget, Mr. Speaker.

Leadership: You have to show leadership. It is very easy to do what is popular; it is a lot harder to do what is right. In this Budget, we did what is right. We know we are going to address the needs of the people out there. We are going to support people, where necessary. We are going to enhance programs and services and we are going to prioritize, and we have done that. We have done it to the tune of \$8 billion in this Budget, Mr. Speaker.

I might note, too, that it is ironic that we speak to the Budget today while the Premier is in Nova Scotia meeting with her Atlantic counterparts. It is not too many years ago, Mr. Speaker, that a Premier from this Province would go up there, they would be welcomed like the poor cousin, welcomed to the room but not really overly engaged. Because we had not had a history where we had proven that we were substantially a good leadership Province to be a part of here, that we had not proven that we have a stake in our own future, that we could take a lead in what we do in this country.

Right now, it is the opposite. Our Premier goes in there as the most acknowledged Premier in this country right now, particularly in the Atlantic provinces. She goes in with the most experience; this is somebody who has served in a multitude of different Cabinet posts and has lots of experience. She goes in as somebody who has worked at the grassroots level. She has been in the gutters with people. She has worked and fought for things in rural Newfoundland. She has lived in rural Newfoundland. She comes from a fishing background. She is cognizant of what goes on. She has worked on the provincial, the national, and the world stage. She has worked with municipalities. So there is the experience.

She walks in that room now being engaged, being asked: What do Newfoundland and

Labrador think? Because we are the leaders in Atlantic Canada. We have the vision. It has been proven. This Administration in the last number of Budgets, in particularly the last two, has shown we are in an economic downturn in the world and Newfoundland is still flying high. We still have the best rating out there that we have had in our history. We have all the financial investors out there wanting to come to Newfoundland and Labrador. We have major investments in the mineral industry. We have it in the mining industry, in the oil industry; we have it in the aerospace industry. That is a testament to what we do here.

Sometimes, though, you have to look at the bottom line when you look at leadership and try to dig down a little bit more personal and see where this person is coming from and where the vision and what their priorities are. I can guarantee you this Premier and this Administration has its priorities set out. Those priorities about making sure that the people of this Province have the resources and have the ability to move forward, Mr. Speaker, and that is what we have managed to do.

Mr. Speaker, we have invested millions over the last number of years and we continue to do it this year in what we do in our Budget process. We have looked at, particularly, addressing the needs of people in rural Newfoundland. How do you do that? We equip people to be better citizens, better engaged, a better ability to do stuff.

The old cliché, give a person a fish you feed him for a day, teach him how to fish you feed him for a lifetime, is part of our philosophy. We have invested in programs and services to help people who have some challenges. We try to make them better equipped education-wise. We try to open doors that may be closed to them. We try to support some of the stumbles that they may have along the way.

Mr. Speaker, this Administration is not just about throwing money at issues. It is about supporting the people, making sure that they have control, that they are engaged, that they choose the path that they go down. If they have

some stumbles along the way, we are there to help pick them up again. We are there to support them, we will modify what their needs are, Mr. Speaker, and that is why we have a social conscience. That is reflective in the hundreds of new programs that we have offered over the last number of years.

Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to talk about some of the major things that we have looked at over the last number of years, and particularly in this Budget here when we talk about what has gone on. Before I get into that, let us reflect over the last number of years with this Administration, what they inherited. In 2003, new government coming in, books are opened, we got a reality check. We are in bad shape; we are borderline bankrupt. How do you deal with that? You get through the first year, you assess it, you make some harsh decisions, you move forward.

In 2004 the harsh decisions had to kick in. There was a reality check. This Province could move forward, but to move forward we have to have the right vision and the right leadership. This Cabinet at the time and this caucus and this Administration who were in place then did that. They took their hits, they took their kicks, they were ridiculed, they were questioned whether or not they were on the right track, and in a short three years people could see the vision that was out there and could see that the right decisions were made.

Mr. Speaker, in 2007, a new investment in programs, a new investment in the civil service, to show the respect that we have for the civil service. A new investment in healthcare, and in education, and in infrastructure, and then the process was started. How do we catch up so that this Province is not a have-not – not only in our financial ability but the fact in our infrastructure and the services that we offer to the citizens here to make sure that they have equal opportunity to make choices; that our young people are educated so they can decide whether or not they want to stay in this Province or leave. If they choose to go in the international market because their skillset is second to none, because our education system in second to none and because it has been affordable for them, that they do not

have to leave to pay off their debt loads and then hopefully one day come back, which may or may not ever happen.

We have made all these changes. We have made changes in the education system, Mr. Speaker, by looking at what were the needs – and we engaged. We engaged the student unions, we engaged the educators, we engaged the administrators, and said: How do we address these particular needs? Between the consultation processes we put out proper white papers on education. We looked at student aid reform.

All these things were implemented, Mr. Speaker, over the last number of years, and in this Budget they continue. They continue with our investment in post-secondary education, in infrastructure design, in assessing what kinds of new programs and services we need – and that is what is being done – in our universities, in research in our universities, particularly, but also in our student debt. How do we keep that an acceptable level?

We have done it by freezing our tuitions, by keeping our incentives that we have on debt-reduction, by encouraging students to be more creative on their education, by encouraging international students to come here. It gives us a better perspective, from a multicultural perspective, but it also generates revenue here and makes an attachment to particular people in fields that could benefit this Province. If nothing else, we could pat ourselves on the back that we are sending educated people out into the world. Be it if they are not originally from this Province, but they are contributing back into their own provinces, their own countries, and their own cultures. That in itself, Mr. Speaker, is a positive.

For far too long, we have had to go somewhere else and somebody take care of us. We have the ability now, Mr. Speaker, to take care of people when they need it, and that is what we have been doing. We do it locally and we do it nationally, too.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: What we have done, too, Mr. Speaker, is gotten to this point where we have looked at our major infrastructure. We have talked about our ferry replacement strategy. While we have been criticized for it, people forget the fact there are two new vessels in the water operating on a daily basis. I have one of them right now, I am happy to say, doing a great job on Bell Island and keeping the people there moving back and forth, the 500 workers that we have every day. We have run into some glitches, but we move that forward.

There are two more. We are gone for a RFP international. We are gone international because, Mr. Speaker, we need two things to be done here. We need it to be affordable so that the taxpayers get the best bang for their buck. As the Premier said, this is about getting more for less. If we can work a good deal out there and get the same kind of product or a better product back for the people of this Province, that is a good investment. That is good, responsible governance.

We also need it in a timely fashion. We know we have an aging fleet. We know with leadership sometimes you make harsh decisions, and this government and the minister made the decision of getting rid of an old boat we knew was not going to serve our needs here. It is better we get rid of it now instead of wasting money on it. We have done that. As we move forward, we are about to do that. There will be more vessels come as part of our strategy.

We managed to do that. We have been working on this. The former Minister of Transportation moved the process forward. We are moving that there. Nobody else in our history has had a strategy about replacing our ferries and making sure the best service possible is given to those areas that are serviced by ferries, and we have done that, Mr. Speaker.

Let's talk about some of the things we have been doing. We have talked about half a billion dollars given back to the taxpayers, back in their pockets to be reinvested in local economies, reinvested into shopping, reinvested into recreation, and reinvested into particular needs.

People want their leisure time. It is not always about what you make and the stress. Sometimes it is about being able to relax and have your leisure time. People have been able to move around this Province and relax with the beautiful scenery we have and all the ability we have for people to be engaged. We have managed to do that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we have done something else I suspect no other Province has done. We had a Retention and Attraction Strategy. We brought back a number of young people, very talented young people, to this Province who are now engaged. They are employed in various sectors. They are employed in the civil service. They are employed in the private sector. They are bringing a skill set back to this Province, but more importantly they are bringing their own community pride when they did not want to leave.

They will start their families here, and their families, the next generation, will be the same ones who give back to the communities. These are the ones who will have a better standard of living because they are better educated, they are better equipped, and they understand how you give back. That is a positive thing we have managed to do, Mr. Speaker, heralded as one of the best things around for being able to attract and keep our own talented young people here.

Our strategy around poverty reduction, Mr. Speaker, and we have been criticized for it, yet everybody else looks at it and says: Let's have a look. Tell us how you have done in engaging, how you have used the existing services that you have; how you have developed new services; how you have implemented them and how you develop partnerships, Mr. Speaker.

In my former life a few years ago before politics, I would get calls everyday from my counterparts in other provinces. Tell us what you are doing about youth engagement. How you can get those involved with the challenges they have under poverty reduction? Those who have specific boundaries, how do you work with those? We have managed to do it.

There are in excess of thirty different types of programs under our Poverty Reduction Strategy so that we can address all the needs, be it single parents, be it persons with disabilities, be it multiculturalism challenges. All of those things are being addressed because there is some vision there. The vision was let's implement things, let's engage people, let's put it in place, and we have done that.

Let's talk about some of the things just in this immediate Budget, what we have invested in Mr. Speaker. We have invested in health care billions over the years. Just recently, millions into recruiting new doctors, in particular some specialists.

We have been criticized because there are certain things that we are still working on. It is not a perfect system nor is it in any province or any country, but we have engaged the proper people and we have looked at a strategy. We have invested our money here. We have put our money where our mouth is because we wanted to make sure we improve the quality of health care for people in this Province, and we have done it.

We have reduced wait times in emergency; very successful. That was one of the objectives that we wanted to do. The Minister of Health set that out when she took over that portfolio, and we have done that. It is not lip service, Mr. Speaker, it is there. The stats speak for themselves. We are noted nationally for what we have done, how we have improved that.

We reduced wait times for a number of other surgeries. We cannot address everything immediately, but we have taken ones that we know we can deal with. We have engaged the proper people. We have put the supports in place and we have managed to improve those. As we do that, we are working on all the other parts of the health care system that need to be improved upon, and we are doing it.

We still have a very healthy health care system. We still have thousands of people who go through surgeries every year. We have hundreds of thousands of procedures that are done over

the course of a period of time. We have people who still come out of our health care system healthier than when they went in, Mr. Speaker. We deal with all of these things.

We have very qualified nurses. I have the ultimate respect for all the people who work in the health care system. We invest money in that to make sure that works for that. We have invested additional money in home support to make sure that we support the families and what is going on with individuals, particularly seniors and how we do that.

We invest in medical research. We want to be leading edge. We do not want people to tell us and be two years later when we get certain parts of medical technology or medical procedures. We want to take the lead. We want to be able to do it first and then move it out to other people, give something back to other people while we are doing it.

We have invested in medical centres in rural Newfoundland. People criticize us for not investing in rural Newfoundland. Look at the last couple of Budgets, and particularly look at this one. The investment that we have made in rural Newfoundland is second to none. It is out there. People are getting better infrastructure, there is more in recreation, and there is more in health care.

There are rural centres out there, but we also do the urban centres. We realize there are catchment areas where you can get a better quality of service, or people need to come in clusters to get the ultimate parcel of services, and that being the health care. We have done that. We have managed to do that very successfully.

We have also supported a number of other organizations that enhance the health care system. We have done that very diligently and very successfully. We have developed multiple policies around health and stakeholders inclusion, and that has been a positive thing.

In education, Mr. Speaker, let's just talk about some of the things we have done. We have

invested in infrastructure, schools and buildings, and enhancing a number of other existing facilities. Second to none, in our college systems and our universities, particularly our secondary, our primary school system.

We have built more new schools than any other Administration. We have enhanced and brought the quality of the existing ones up. We added in proper recreation and proper facilities there for special needs kids. We have also added in special needs supports. We have added libraries. We have enhanced and brought them up to a modern stage so kids are not in worrying about mould, worrying about cold and wet, and all these types of things. We have done that.

We have pumped hundreds of millions of dollars into that to make sure the education system here is a quality one for our kids as it would be no matter where they lived. We have done that. We have not been criticized for that any more. One time we were criticized years ago for that, but that does not happen any more.

We are building state-of-the-art schools. I am happy to be able to say I am getting two new schools announced in this Budget, the design and the land acquisition right here.

AN HON. MEMBER: How many?

MR. BRAZIL: Two, one in Paradise and one in Portugal Cove – St. Philip's, a phenomenal investment in that part of the community for me. These are thriving communities, young families, people who have come home, and people who want to be engaged in that. They want proper education and we are giving it to them because we have invested in those areas.

Do not forget, over the last number of years, and we continue to do it, we have dropped school fees and free books for people. That is an add-on that we go across the board. Every parent, every person can attest that is a positive. It is an add-on. It makes no difference where your economic base is, you know that is a positive thing. We have given back to every citizen here.

We want education to be about learning, and we want parents to be able to support the learning process by making sure that kids are supported at home. We will take care of all the infrastructure part. That is the responsibility of government. We have done that, and we continue to do that, Mr. Speaker.

We have done enhanced supports for special needs, deaf and hard of hearing students, all kinds of new, innovative technologies. We wanted to make sure no kid is segregated when they are in our school system, that they are supported with the proper mechanisms and the proper supports. We have done it, and done it very diligently, and to the point where people now accept that we are a trend leader.

Early childhood learning, formative years and preschool, talk to the Minister of Education. He continuously talks about it. We are investing in the early years because the early years are where it goes. The early years are what set the tone. So when they get into the mainstream school system they are better equipped. They will have a better chance of being able to sustain that level of education and moving themselves forward.

It takes the burden off the parents to a certain degree if they know their kids are starting off on an even keel with any other kid. That makes it a lot easier. It decreases the stress levels and it decreases the anxiety for parents going forward. It makes sure those kids then can be successful over the next thirteen years that they will spend in the school system.

We have also invested in technology, SMART Boards in every school. That was an anomaly four or five years ago. People would look at that, if a school could afford to get it or if a certain charity managed to do something like that, well, that was an add-on. Now every school has them. Every classroom has them. The technology is second to none. Schools are integrated with each other. They are sharing information.

I talk to a number of principals and I go out to a number of the schools in my district. It is phenomenal how they can use that, how kids

now are in the twenty-first century. It makes no difference if they are in Stockholm, Sweden, or if they are in St. John's, Newfoundland, or if they are in Englee, they still get that same type of service. That is a positive there, Mr. Speaker, about what we have done.

To invest in any Budget, you have to have vision, you have to have leadership, and you have to make some decisions that are in the best interests of everybody involved. We have done that in this Budget. We have the proper leadership, Mr. Speaker, and we have the proper vision. That is why this Budget will be the cornerstone for how we move forward and maintain the standard of living that we have in this Province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Wiseman): The hon. the Member for St. Barbe.

MR. BENNETT: Yes, Mr. Speaker, today I would like to speak about what it means, first of all, to be a have Province. Over the past few years, we have become a have Province. What does it mean to become a have Province?

Contrary to popular belief, it does not mean that you have a whole lot of extra money. Becoming a have Province, Mr. Speaker, is like leaving home. It is like moving out. It is like becoming responsible for your own bills, your own overhead, and your own expenses.

This Province came into Confederation in 1949, and for most of the time we have been part of Confederation, we have been a have-not Province. Mr. Speaker, that simply means other provinces that are doing better through federal transfer payments have supported a level of services that we deem as Canadians appropriate for everybody to receive.

A few years back, this Province was fortunate enough that our revenue was high enough that we became a have Province. Mr. Speaker, it is almost like somebody leaving home, getting

their first job, their first apartment, and their first paycheque. All of this spells independence. Unfortunately, somebody who first leaves home cannot manage money very well, and that is where we find this government. This government has done a terrible job of managing our have status.

What have they done? Well, it would be the equivalent of hiring all their friends without checking their credentials. It would be the equivalent of buying a very expensive vehicle you could not afford. It would be the equivalent of taking all your friends on vacations. It would be the equivalent of throwing big parties and having no accountability whatsoever for the finances of the Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. BENNETT: That is where we find ourselves today. That is where we find ourselves, because this government is so overextended – I accept what the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island said when he said that this government took over a significant deficit. It did take over a significant deficit both in revenue and in real estate and in infrastructure. It also took over Hibernia, White Rose, Terra Nova, and Voisey's Bay. Those could not be seen as deficits; they would have to be seen as assets.

Mr. Speaker, in 2004 in the Speech from the Throne this government said it would develop a comprehensive infrastructure strategy to guide investments in the public infrastructure in a manner that promotes growth. The 2006 Speech from the Throne said existing infrastructure, including roads and public buildings, have been eroding throughout Newfoundland and Labrador for decades.

In the Budget, March 2007, it said that the infrastructure strategy was valued at \$2 billion; in 2011, \$5 billion. Mr. Speaker, when the Auditor General said show me your infrastructure strategy, it was denied. The Office of the Auditor General was denied an

opportunity to review the infrastructure strategy that this government claims to have run up \$5 billion, \$6 billion or \$7 billion. We do not know how much, and we do not know where it went.

The Auditor General went further than that, being a creative individual, made inquiries as to, well, let me have a look at all of your individual departments that would have made up what you claim to have put into the infrastructure of the Province. The response that came back on July 5, 2011: With respect to your inquiry regarding what documentation is available for repairs, et cetera, et cetera, we are not going to tell you anything because it is protected under Cabinet confidences.

Mr. Speaker, this was before Bill 29 was introduced, which pulled a black drape over the front of the Confederation Building – not the one we see covering up for the over-budgeted and long-delayed repairs, but we shut down information to the public in this Province in a way that rarely do you see in a Western democracy any more. The Auditor General was denied access to the information related to the infrastructure fund. So, we do not know what the government was supposed to do with the money and we do not know what they did with the money, but we know that it is gone, we know that there is a massive deficit, and we know that we now have a Budget that is almost twice as big as it was in 2003.

They expanded the size of government and it can only be seen as through preferential hiring policies, through hiring their friends. Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General reports that the Public Service Commission Act says the public service excellence promotes excellence through merit, fairness, and respect. Then the Auditor General went looking to see if people were hired based on merit and if they were hired fairly. In pursuing the hiring practices of this government, selected one department, Advanced Education and Skills training, selected sixty-two files – and there is a way to circumvent the appropriate hiring practices as set down in the Public Service Act and that is hiring for thirteen weeks only and granting extensions. Thirteen weeks

for bargaining unit positions, six months for non-bargaining unit positions.

The Auditor General selected sixty-two temporary hires and found that of the sixty-two, forty-two were hired without a job competition. Mr. Speaker, more than two-thirds of the people who were hired of the sixty-two selected by the Auditor General, more than two-thirds of them were hired with no job competition.

There is also another way to extend and expand the size of government and keep your friends in jobs without having to properly post them or have proper competition – you can extend the thirteen weeks repeatedly and keep extending and keep extending. Government has been fond of doing this to such an extent that of the forty-two temporary hires where there was an individual hired in a bargaining unit position, thirty-two out of the forty-two have been extended and they have received extensions ranging from seven weeks to eleven years beyond the maximum of thirteen weeks.

We have people who have been hired for up to eleven weeks are eleven years on temporary positions. Mr. Speaker, no wonder the size of government has grown. No wonder there is uncertainty by people as to where the money has gone. Because this government has been on pretty much of a spending spree over nearly a ten-year period.

Now, the Auditor General concludes that of the forty-one or forty-two files reviewed, the department could not demonstrate on what basis the individuals were initially selected or whether any merit principles were followed. As a result, the underlying foundation for hiring and promotion with the public service was not fulfilled. Mr. Speaker, that is a ringing indictment of this government's preferential hiring treatment, its way that it has circumvented its own laws and the way that it has expanded government unnecessarily and inappropriate over the last decade.

Mr. Speaker, it does not end there. They have also let the place go to rack and ruin. They have let the place run down day after day after day. If

you look at one particular area that is very troublesome, this Province has the highest workers' compensation costs in Canada. We have been the highest for twenty years and it makes us anti-competitive and non-competitive for business setting up here.

Mr. Speaker, where does workers' compensation cost come from? Basically, it comes from three components. It comes from the claim, the chance of a claim, it comes from how long it takes to get a person back to work, and it comes from overhead. When you look at claims, during 2010 the health and safety inspections were not done on 61.8 per cent of the employers with the highest workers' comp rates in the Province; over 60 per cent no inspection during a year.

Furthermore, during 2010, the government did not inspect 48 per cent of employers that had ten claims or more in a five-year period. So, these unsafe employers that are being allowed to run businesses, run companies, and let workers get injured are falling underneath the radar because this government is not bothering with the inspection of them.

Most employers are diligent employers, they are responsible employers, but some are not. This government needs to root them out because that is one of the causes of the highest workers' compensation costs in Canada, which is a tax on employers and ultimately a tax on individuals. Furthermore, the thought that companies would be allowed to keep on doing business where they are not inspected, where they are dangerous places to work, undeterred by any sort of regulation in 2013 is absolutely abominable. It looks like something from a Charles Dickens book.

Mr. Speaker, it continues. Of 18,471 employers in the Province in 2010 only 7 per cent were even inspected by government to determine if they had an occupational health and safety policy or program in place; 7 per cent of 18,000 employers were even inspected to see if they had an occupational health and safety program in place; 93 per cent of over 18,000 employers

were not inspected for occupational health and safety. Where is this government?

Mr. Speaker, the downsizing of government is something which is done in a slash and burn sort of fashion. One of the areas that is most troubling in this government is the failure to maintain public buildings in this Province. These are all areas that the Auditor General dealt with in his 2011 report that the Public Accounts Committee did not look at. These areas were not examined and not reviewed. That will all be out in a report that is coming very shortly.

in 2004, the Auditor General reported that there were 851 buildings on 397 sites and said the conclusions in the 2004 report – and this part will make the last government look bad because they had no money - the AG said in 2004: Government owned buildings are in need of significant repairs. Department officials have expressed concern about the lack of funding needed to maintain government buildings. It required maintenance in capital alterations and improvements not done, and database not complete.

We roll forward by eight years and what do we find? We found back in 2004 that it would take \$259 million to bring all the buildings up to scratch. Eight years later it takes \$549 million. The deferred maintenance on the public property owned in this Province has doubled in eight years when this government was flush with cash – doubled. This is absolutely disgraceful.

In the fiscal year ended March 2012, it was budgeted – this House of Assembly voted \$156 million for maintenance work on buildings. During that period, Transportation and Works only spent \$25 million out of \$150 million. They were able to use sixteen cents on the dollar that was voted. No wonder the buildings are run down. They say that we inherited an infrastructure deficit. Clearly they did inherit an infrastructure deficit, and made it far worse than it was in times of plenty.

Mr. Speaker, it gets worse. Vacant properties: The Auditor General could identify twenty-five vacant properties no longer in use, not needed,

several for significant periods of time. These properties often require utility and maintenance resources despite being unoccupied.

Imagine, Mr. Speaker, walking away from twenty-five buildings and leaving them empty, unused and unneeded with the heat and light on. The people of this Province are supposed to pay for that and this is supposed to be good governance. This is during a time when we have had adequate resources, and we have been more focused on looking good in the public eye rather than carrying on the business of government. This government has failed miserably in fiscal management of this Province and continues to do so.

Mr. Speaker, the financial affairs of this Province have been adrift for a long, long time. If you look at the various departments, you can ask any government department that you wish: What is your plan for five years; what is your plan for ten years? They do not have a plan for next week.

If you look at the Department of Education, you say: Well, what about the PISA scores? The minister has a blank look like he thinks you are ordering something to eat, like a pizza. PISA is the Programme for International Student Assessment. It is from France; it is supported by the OECD. We are sliding; we are going backwards.

If you talk about, as I spoke about in my maiden speech last year, doubling our seafood industry in ten years, the minister continues to say that our seafood industry, that our fishery is \$1 billion industry. Yes, Mr. Speaker, it is a \$1 billion industry, it was a \$1 billion industry ten years ago, and it is still \$1 billion industry. That is not growth. In fact, adjusted for inflation, that is shrinkage. That is falling behind. We should be going forward, but we are not going forward. You cannot go forward without a plan. What is the plan? There is no plan.

Mr. Speaker, only a few weeks ago, to give you an example of how far off base the Department of Education is, there was a story on CBC that said that the Minister of Education was

considering consolidating the Eastern School District and Nova Central School District. I responded with a Tweet and then the minister took great exception to it, and absolutely swore up and down that I was 100 per cent wrong and it was not going to happen. Well, did he not know that he was going to collapse all of them, or did somebody tell him after the fact? Did he not know?

This government has made promises with respect to school busing. In 2003, they said they would work toward having school buses that would be no more than ten years old. Yet the disparity between contractor school buses and school board school buses is staggering because contractors are not being given enough money to maintain and operate the school buses. Another downside to the children who are served by contractors is that they have to pay extra for extracurricular activities. If they do not pay extra, then they do not get to take in those activities.

Mr. Speaker, in Estimates last week, officials from the Department of Education said: No, it is twelve years now. Well, it is not twelve years. The former Minister of Education said we would have it under control for ten years, and still approximately a quarter of our school buses are more than ten years old.

Mr. Speaker, to demonstrate how far behind in this type of planning they are, school buses have to be ordered generally by the first of January for September because school buses are a custom buy. You cannot just run down to some car dealer and buy a school bus. You have to order them. In the middle of all this, the school-bus operators want to know: Will I have a contract? Are you going to follow the D250 rules? What will you do with school busing? The government cannot say.

Never mind that they do not know what they are going to be doing with the school boards, if you start in January and they do not know what they are going to need for busing, presumably the students are still going to be there. Regardless of who runs the boards, buses will still be necessary, but nobody can make a decision. Mr.

Speaker, nobody can make a decision in this government because there is no plan. There is a plan to get from one day to the next, and that is sorely lacking.

Mr. Speaker, if you look at last year's Budget, last year's Budget said \$124 a barrel for oil. On the very day we had the lock-up for the Budget, oil was \$118. At \$20 million to \$25 million per dollar less than the estimated amount, that means that we were already behind \$150 million on that amount on the very day of the Budget lock-up. Mr. Speaker, the financial accountability is absolutely critical and it is completely absent in this government.

In another area, we have opportunity on the West Coast for significant oil development through fracking. Will the government bring in regulations? No, the government is not bringing in regulations. So that means that protestors have the opportunity to have the field and push and push and push. In the absence of any leadership, anything will do.

Mr. Speaker, I reminded of the quote that says in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king; and this government clearly is in the land of the blind.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. HUTCHINGS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Seeing the time of the day, I move, seconded by the Minister of Transportation and Works, that the House do now adjourn.

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

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Motion carried.

The House now stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow, Tuesday.

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