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Speaker: Honourable Ross Wiseman, MHA

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The House met at 2:00 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 Carbonear – Harbour Grace; the Member for the District of Bellevue; the Member for the District of Humber Valley; the Member for the District of St. John's North; the Member for the District of Conception Bay East – Bell Island, and the Member for the District of Terra Nova.

The hon. the Member for the District of Carbonear – Harbour Grace.

MR. SLADE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to congratulate two young people from my District of Carbonear – Harbour Grace who recently won prestigious awards at the forty-fourth Annual Carbonear Kiwanis Regional Music Festival.

Sixteen-year-old Leslie Norman from Carbonear has joined a select group of performers by winning the Senior Rose Bowl at this year's festival. Leslie is a member of the Carbonear Collegiate school choir, plays piano and the soprano saxophone, and trains with her singing coach, Calvin Powell. Leslie is also very active in public speaking and plans to pursue a career in French.

Sixteen-year-old Matthew Cooper of Carbonear was the recipient of the Junior Rose Bowl at the same event. Also coached by Calvin Powell. Matthew began his specialized vocal training just three years ago. He performed two songs in the festival to capture this coveted award. Singing is his passion, and he was honoured just to be nominated for the award.

Both Leslie and Matthew enjoy strong support from both family and fellow students.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. members to join me in congratulating Leslie and Matthew on winning the Senior and Junior Rose Bowls at the Carbonear Kiwanis Music Festival.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. PEACH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House to recognize two students from Crescent Collegiate of Blaketown in the District of Bellevue on winning first and second place in the Community Five Lions speak off 2014.

Speaking on the topic, fears, Hailie Parsons of Markland won first place, while the second place winner was Steven Day Reid of Dildo and he spoke on the topic, self confidence and self-esteem.

These two students gave outstanding speeches, very positive, very confident and with a great poise they captured the attention of everyone in the audience. In fact, they made it very difficult for the judges to decide a winner. Both students advanced to the next round of speak offs. Community Five Lions Club has been sponsoring and supporting the speak-off for twenty-plus years, Mr. Speaker.

I ask all the members to join me in congratulating Hailie and Steven on winning the Lions speak-off at the Crescent Collegiate in Blaketown.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Humber Valley.

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise in this hon. House today to recognize Ruby's Rat Pack of Pasadena, a non-profit organization made up of seven women who started the group in 2009 when their friend Ruby Watts was diagnosed with breast cancer at the age of forty-four. The group held several fundraisers to help offset the cost of Ruby travelling from Pasadena to St. John's for her cancer treatments.

The group immediately recognized the value to Ruby's family and decided that they would continue to support the breast cancer fundraising campaign by participating in the annual Relay for Life event. The funds they raised were put to good use locally in Pasadena.

Through donations from residents, and community businesses, Ruby's Rat Pack raise funds by holding various fundraisers throughout the year to help families in Pasadena who may be required to travel for medical treatment; 100 per cent of the proceeds go towards helping families in Pasadena. Since November 2009 the group has helped thirty-seven families, raising and giving away almost \$20,000 to a community of just 3,350 residents.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all members of this House to join with me in recognizing Gay Walsh, Marie Walsh, Juanita Walsh, Ruby Watts, Bonnie White, Michelle Kennedy, and Nancy Ann Rockwell of Ruby's Rat Pack of Pasadena.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: I rise today to congratulate Leary's Brook Junior High student Teniqua Hayter on winning the twenty-third annual Bridge Building Competition organized by the Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Model Bridge Building Competition is held each year as part of National Engineering and Geoscience Month. Students across

Newfoundland and Labrador participate by designing and constructing the strongest model bridge they can using only popsicle sticks and white glue.

Each entry is judged by a panel of practicing civil engineers who grade each bridge's quality. Then, each bridge is tested to destruction as they are subjected to increasing pressure until they break.

Teniqua's bridge withstood 800 kilograms of force without failing. It could have withstood more pressure still, but 800 kilograms was the full capacity of the hydraulic actuator used for the competition. Incredibly, her bridge has been sent to Memorial University of Newfoundland in order to find out exactly how much weight it can hold up to.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. members to join me in thanking the Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Newfoundland and Labrador for their sponsorship of the Model Bridge Competition, and congratulating Teniqua Hayter of Leary's Brook for her award-winning engineering.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise to acknowledge a resident of my district who this past weekend was inducted into the Newfoundland and Labrador Sports Hall of Fame. Mr. Colin Abbott of Portugal Cove-St. Phillips has been acknowledged as Newfoundland and Labrador's most accomplished fast pitch softball player.

Colin is recognized in the international softball community as one of the most feared hitters in the game. His career spans some twenty-eight years from local to international competition,

and this has led him to represent his country fifteen times in international play.

Colin's career started as a young man and included representing our Province at the 1989 Canada Summer Games in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. This was the start of Colin's travels as a noted superstar. Colin has achieved sixteen international championships, thirteen national championships, two junior championships. As an individual, he has won three international MVP awards, a Top Batter award, and an unprecedented fifteen All World selection nods. Colin is also considered one of the Province's most respected hockey referees.

I ask all members to join me in congratulating Colin on his induction to the Newfoundland and Labrador Sports Hall of Fame.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. S. COLLINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to recognize a tremendous gentleman from my district, Mr. Ross Saunders of Gambo.

Born in 1931, he spent the greater part of his working life as a telegraph operator, and then as technology progressed Mr. Saunders had to retrain and adapt his skill set, later becoming a telecoms technician. After moving around the Province with his work, he and his wife, Grace, whom he had met while in Corner Brook, moved back to his hometown of Dark Cove, or Gambo as it is known today.

Mr. Saunders, upon his arrival back home, became a very active volunteer in his community. He was particularly involved with the Society of United Fishermen. He has held a variety of roles in this organization, including Treasurer, Secretary, and most recently, Chaplain.

Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of attending the one hundred and fifteenth Anniversary of the St. John Lodge #40 in Gambo a couple of weeks ago. It was at this event that Mr. Saunders was honoured with his sixty-fifth year of service to the group – a remarkable feat!

I ask all members of this hon. House to join me in thanking Mr. Saunders for his lifetime service to his community and to the charitable work of the SUF. You are to be commended.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CRUMMELL: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in this hon. House to provide an update on our new "Move Over" legislation under the *Highway Traffic Act*, which came into effect on March 10. The law protects emergency, enforcement, and other types of roadside assistance personnel as they carry out their duties at roadside.

Mr. Speaker, the "Move Over" law requires motorists to slow down and move over to an adjacent lane or otherwise safely give a wide berth when approaching designated vehicles and workers performing their duties by the side of the road.

The response we have had to this legislation has been overwhelmingly positive. Through our Web site and a targeted social media campaign, we have reached out to thousands of drivers. Key stakeholders including police forces and municipal enforcement agencies, utility companies such as Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro and Newfoundland Power, roadside assistance companies, the media and the general public have helped us spread our message that

drivers need to slow down and move over. Our YouTube video, which provides animated examples of how to respond to the new law, is one of the most viewed videos on the provincial government's YouTube channel.

Mr. Speaker, the practice of slowing down and moving over reflects safe, responsible driving. Motorists who choose to ignore the new law can be fined up to \$900 and receive four demerit points on their driving record. It is everyone's responsibility to ensure they operate their vehicles in a responsible manner to protect those working at the side of the road.

Mr. Speaker, the new "Move Over" law supports existing highway safety legislation that requires drivers to pull over and yield to emergency enforcement vehicles which are approaching with sirens activated and lights flashing. It is essential that drivers obey the law in order to ensure that ambulances, fire trucks, and police vehicles are able to reach their destinations as quickly as possible in order to save lives and provide essential public safety services.

We encourage all drivers to visit our Web site at servicenl.gov.nl.ca to be sure they understand the law. By working together we can improve safety for workers and all who travel on our Province's roadways.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. Mr. Speaker, I think this is a wonderful piece of legislation which was passed. We all voted for it unanimously in the House of Assembly back during the last sitting of the House of Assembly.

It is great to be able to protect our emergency service workers, whether it be RNC, RCMP, ambulance operators, fire department, or crews

with Newfoundland Power and so on who are working on the side of the roads and to have a piece of legislation in place to protect them. We certainly support it.

In in terms of this particular Ministerial Statement, I am not sure what the big announcement is in this particular one. I see the minister talked about they have a government YouTube site that a few people went on. I guess that is great to promote it any way you can. It seems to me that this is more about government patting itself on the back.

If that is what it is about then I will pat myself on the back, I will pat my colleague on the back, I will pat the Member for St. John's East on the back, and the Member for Bay of Islands on the back, because we all passed this unanimously. I would also say to the minister, I hope we get to the point in time in the House of Assembly where we can all likewise get up and pat ourselves on the back because we are actually enforcing the blue zone legislation, which was passed in this House of Assembly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LANE: I know it may take a while because before we can do that, of course, we need to get our hospitals up to –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The member's time has expired.

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. I am not afraid to pat government on the back for listening to New Democrats this time when they said this law was needed.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MURPHY: We worked long and hard for this one, so I will pat government on the back for actually listening to us this particular time.

Mr. Speaker, there needs to be a little bit more evaluation done on this because there is a pretty important point here and I will bring it to the attention of government now. I was listening to an RCMP officer the other day who was doing one of this on-the-road log reports, if you will, talking about the traffic. She was talking about, at that particular time, the lack of compliance with the law at the same time.

I have to ask the government about their evaluation techniques they are talking about in this. Yes, it is a great piece of legislation. I was only too proud to have supported that legislation that day and to have fronted that to the government in the first place. Again, I would be very interested to see government's evaluation techniques and how they are going to evaluate the performance of this act.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. MURPHY: Thank you very much.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DALLEY: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise in this hon. House today to highlight the success of Newfoundland and Labrador's agriculture and agri-foods industry.

This industry is one of the fastest growing in our Province and it is continuously developing and diversifying. The value of production from agriculture and agri-foods industry, including the secondary processing of dairy products such as ice cream and milk, is approximately \$500 million per year.

The agriculture industry generates employment for 6,500 people in rural communities of Newfoundland and Labrador. It puts food on our tables and fresh produce on our shelves. Historically, agriculture is as much a part of

Newfoundland and Labrador as the forest and fishing industries, dating back to the time when families grew the bulk of their own food.

Today, our Province is home to the largest poultry broiler operation in Canada and one of the largest dairy operations in Canada. We are self-sufficient in dairy and chicken, and we export significant amounts of eggs and fur. We recognize the tremendous opportunities as we continue to develop the potential of our fresh fruit, vegetable, and processing sectors.

Mr. Speaker, the provincial government, through Budget 2014, is committed to supporting responsible resource management and development with strategic investments in the Province's agriculture and agri-foods industry. We have a suite of programs available to assist the industry from start-up to production, and we have helped hundreds of farmers and producers.

The provincial government has committed more than \$12 million to further grow the industry, for programs such as Growing Forward 2 and the Agricultural and Agrifoods Development Fund, which will foster innovation, competitiveness and adaptability, as well as help farmers develop new markets and industry capacity.

Under the Provincial Agrifoods Assistance Program we are improving industry competitiveness. Our Land Consolidation Program provides an opportunity for non-farm landowners and retiring farmers to sell granted land to the provincial government making that land available for new farm initiatives.

Our Agriculture Research Initiative funds many projects that enhance sustainability in the industry. In 2013, for example, one forward thinking initiative took a creative approach to growing winter wheat on the West Coast of the Province. The goal is to offset the cost of production for the dairy and poultry industries. Also, through our Agricultural Limestone Program, farmers can purchase limestone at a reasonable cost.

By continuing to support our farmers and producers, our government is encouraging the

further development of the agriculture and agrifoods industry in this Province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: I want to thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement today. Of course, much of the activity that the minister talks about happens right in the Humber Valley area, much of it in District of Humber Valley. The \$500 million per year that the minister mentioned – my District of Humber Valley is certainly home to many dairy farmers, and the winter wheat project that the minister talked about to support the dairy farmers occurs right there. It is a great project. There has been a lot of success to that, and I would certainly encourage you to further invest in that; because what it does is it supports the industry as we then feed the dairy cattle.

Mr. Speaker, we have 25,000 acres of producing farm land in our Province. Through our Estimates that we had this morning in Natural Resources, one of the questions that came up: In order to provide food security in our Province when it comes to fruits and vegetable, how much land would be required? Well, the answer came back to be 100,000 acres that we would need to be producing. That is an important number of remember.

We all know that within recent days when we look at Marine Atlantic and the challenges of the ferry system not being able to deliver fresh fruits and vegetables on a regular basis, the challenge that it creates. So it is important for us to be able to have the food security in our Province, grow it right here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

We need the 100,000 acres, as I mentioned. Right now, we currently have available to us, as farm land, about 77,000, but unfortunately this is number that is falling. So in order for this industry to continue to grow – no pun intended – we will need to make sure that we have farm

land available to us to get to the 100,000 acres that was mentioned.

There is significant opportunity in our Province, I say, Mr. Speaker. I would encourage the continuing of this investment. I certainly want to reach out and say thank you to all the farmers and their families for the great job that they do feeding Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I thank the minister for the advanced copy of his statement. I have to say I was very encouraged this morning in Estimates, hearing a lot of the good news regarding the agricultural and agrifoods industries.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS MICHAEL: The people in the Province are working hard at this and I am glad to see that government is supporting the work of our farmers. It is a truly sustainable industry which is very important for rural areas of the Province, whether it is increased grain production on the Avalon Peninsula, the work towards food security or the increase in the interest of certified organic farming – we do not have anybody certified yet, but moves are going in that direction – there is good news for the industry.

I hope the department will work hard to encourage young people into agriculture – surely a tough career, but one which will be very rewarding for them. We have great officials in the department – I was really impressed with them today – who are clearly devoted to the promotion of this industry and I say, keep up the good work.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. FRENCH: Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to a native Newfoundlander and Labradorian who made our Province incredibly proud throughout her performance at the 2014 Winter Olympics. Kaetlyn Osmond, originally from Marystown, showed our Province, the country, and indeed the world that she is one of the best in the sport of figure skating.

Ms Osmond's road to the Olympics began when she was two years old and put on her first pair of figure skates. She moved to Alberta when she was ten and joined the Ice Palace Skating Club, which she currently represents. In the 2012-2013 season, Ms Osmond won her first international title at the 2012 Nebelhorn Trophy competition. She then made her senior Grand Prix debut at the 2012 Skate Canada event, where she captured the gold medal. She went on to win her first senior national title at the 2013 Senior Women's Canadian Figure Skating Championships and also place eighth at the World Championships.

Mr. Speaker, undoubtedly televisions and SMART Boards all throughout Newfoundland and Labrador were turned on for Kaetlyn's outstanding performances at this year's Olympics. I am certain cheers could be heard all across our Province when she won a silver medal in the team figure skating competition, and we were also exceptionally proud of her performance in the women's long program. Her perseverance and passion are truly inspirational, and she demonstrated these qualities well during her time at the Olympics.

There are many characteristics associated with being an elite athlete, and Kaetlyn Osmond personifies each and every one of them. Aside from her athletic ability, she has exhibited professionalism and strength of character that are second to none. Her journey is a wonderful example of how dedication, commitment and a passion for a sport can help you attain the ultimate in sport achievement, namely the Olympics. Our government is exceptionally proud of her outstanding accomplishments.

Mr. Speaker, I can think of no better role model than Kaetlyn Osmond to encourage young people to always put their best efforts forward and follow their dreams. She is a shining example of how hard work and commitment help us succeed, no matter what path we choose to follow.

Tomorrow, Mr. Speaker, we are delighted to have the opportunity to meet Kaetlyn when she returns home to the Province, and we will host an event in her honour in the East Block lobby at 1:30 p.m. I certainly invite all people who work in government and all members opposite to please join us.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: I want to thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. Certainly, all of us in this House of Assembly and everyone in Newfoundland and Labrador would want to congratulate Kaetlyn Osmond on her achievements in the world figure skating.

I cannot imagine being two-years old, after going and putting on your first pair of skates – I would assume that from there on in it was a dream for her to participate at the world stage in the Olympics. We all watched with anticipation and certainly with great pride as Kaetlyn performed in the Winter Olympics at Sochi.

I want to congratulate her friends and her family in Marystown, who truly showed what it is to be Newfoundlanders and Labradorians as we supported and rallied to support Kaetlyn in her endeavour.

She represented not only Newfoundland and Labrador, our Province, but certainly the country. She did it with poise, she did it grace. She was a major part of the silver medal win in the team competition. More than that, she is a great ambassador for our Province and certainly for the country of Canada.

She is a perfect example, when you look at her skating, the perfect example for the next generation, very inspiring, and she would encourage others to follow in her footsteps in the world of figure skating. It tells when you have family support, you have great coaches, great sponsors, that is certainly a great recipe for success and Kaetlyn did that with grace.

Mr. Speaker, we do look forward to meeting Kaetlyn tomorrow, some at the airport, some right here in Confederation Building, but the journey will continue as she moves on to the Burin Peninsula and in Marystown this weekend. Well, I can assure you there will be probably thousands of people out to meet her in Marystown on this weekend.

We continue to wish her all the success, and as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians we will certainly be watching her career with great interest in the future.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement. I am delighted to have a second opportunity to respond to a Ministerial Statement with regard to Kaetlyn Osmond.

I was really lucky. In 2012, I was at the national championships for Canada when Kaetlyn skated for the first time in the senior competition and received her bronze medal, and then again in 2013 and 2014 when she won the national championships. Each time she has skated in our national championships she has been a medal holder. Then to go on the Olympic team, it was just fantastic for her.

I knew the minute I saw her on the ice in 2012, I said to her parents – I was really happy to meet them at that time. We were sitting very close together in the stadium. I said she has something special, and she has proven to the

world that she has something special. She really is special. That smile says it all.

For anybody who has not met her, I really encourage you tomorrow to meet her. She has an openness and a self-composure, and a real sense of herself in a very humble way. I just find her a very fantastic person. I am delighted that she is getting the recognition.

I would also like to recognize her parents because they were the ones who saw it. They were the ones who supported her, who were willing to move, to go to Alberta to be able to support her in her career. Congratulations to her, her parents, and all of her family and friends in Marystown.

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.

Yesterday it was revealed that costs at Muskrat Falls are going up and that first power may be delayed. In response to this news, the Government of Nova Scotia said that this delay would have zero impact on them as Nalcor is still required to deliver the energy by some other means or reimburse Nova Scotia for the cost.

I ask the minister: Where will you find the extra power? It will not be available here on the Island? Where will you find the extra power for Nova Scotia or will you just simply pay a fee?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DALLEY: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the independent engineer's report was released to

the public. It is a very technical and detailed report that outlines many positive aspects about Muskrat Falls and the work that Nalcor is doing. It is certainly a strong endorsement for their overall ability to carry out this project and be successful with the project.

A couple of things highlighted around cost pressures, Mr. Speaker, and schedule pressures, built in around that obviously there is a response from Nova Scotia and concern about their power supply. Obviously we are in a contractual agreement with Nova Scotia, an agreement that we feel we can live up to our obligations. In the event of any significant project delays, which are not foreseen at this point, then obviously under the agreement we would provide the power to Nova Scotia.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The question was more about we understand the dynamics around the agreement. The question is you have to have available power.

I ask the minister: What are the options for that available power to meet the needs in Nova Scotia, or will you just pay the fee?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DALLEY: Mr. Speaker, obviously Nalcor has worked out those issues.

I want to raise a point here that the member opposite is raising, because for some time in this House we were criticized very much so on the fact that we are going to have surplus power and nobody wanted to buy it – right? If there is enough power out there, nobody is going to want our surplus power. Now when we look at the

fact that if we do get in a situation where we need power, obviously, as attested to by the critics, there is power out there. So, we would either go to the spot market to provide that power or enter into another contract, but obviously there would be a commitment from Nalcor to provide Emera with the power, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We have seen in recent events if Muskrat Falls is delayed, there is no power available, as I said, on the Island. So it is obvious that people in our Province will have to pay Nova Scotia or find that power.

I ask the minister: If Muskrat Falls is delayed by one year, how much money will the taxpayers of Newfoundland and Labrador have to pay the Province of Nova Scotia?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DALLEY: Mr. Speaker, that would be contractual details. I am sure I could look into some of those details, but what is important here is that we are on schedule. We are on a tight schedule. There is aggressive management for this project, Mr. Speaker. There is a full commitment by Nalcor, and certainly by the government, that we are going to aggressively focus on costs and scheduling to keep the project where we say it is going to be.

Built in around that and the contractual agreements, because it is a good deal. It is a good deal we have with Emera and Nova Scotia, because it provides reliability, Mr. Speaker, another advantage to this project. Within that agreement we will live up to those obligations and we believe we will meet our targets, but, Mr. Speaker, because of the deal with Emera,

should there be any issue on the Island around power, we also have the ability to bring power in for the people of the Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I remind the minister that we have heard many, many times in this House that this is a project that has been studied more than any other project in the history of the Province. We have heard that over and over again, yet here today we find ourselves in a situation, if this project is delayed one year we do not know what the liability is for this Province.

I ask the minister: If this project is delayed one year, what are the total additional costs? Are they in the magnitude of \$100 million, \$200 million, \$300 million, or do we even know what the magnitude is?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DALLEY: Mr. Speaker, if I had a number I would certainly provide it to them, but there are a number of factors obviously involved in that, and I do not have a number that I can give to the hon. member. I will say, because he referenced about the project – I think what is important here for the people of the Province to understand as well, as we look at this project, it is a significant project; thousands of workers, and it is a five- or six-year project.

When the independent engineer did their work, Mr. Speaker, and the report released yesterday, it clearly outlined that there are going to be issues, but what is important for the people of the Province and government is that the right management is in place. In the report yesterday, the independent engineer said that Nalcor is "...qualified to design, contract, manage,

commission, operate and maintain..." Muskrat Falls.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I remind the minister this was not about Nalcor. It was not about delivering this project. What it was about was delays in this project. I remind the minister the independent engineer clearly said we have to be concerned about delays.

Also in the engineer's report, Nalcor blacked out most of the information around firm energy and firm power available from Muskrat Falls. Yesterday, the Premier said he did not know why Nalcor was keeping such basic information secret.

I ask the minister: Will he order Nalcor to release this information so the people of the Province can know how much firm energy and firm power Muskrat Falls will produce?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DALLEY: Mr. Speaker, the number for power availability out of Muskrat Falls is 824 megawatts. That has not changed – 4.9 terawatts. I think the hon. member would know, certainly from his business background, when you have something you want to sell you do not lay your cards on the table as you go into negotiations. You do not reveal the information.

We have 824 megawatts of power, Mr. Speaker, and there are various scenarios about the different needs we will have in our Province. We are firmly committed that the people of the Province have first right to this power, but any excess power we are going to sell and make a profit for the people of the Province that we can spend all over this Province and improve the standard of living in this Province. The details

around those scenarios are not out there because it is sensitive to negotiations and we are not going to jeopardize that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: I ask the minister, if it was sensitive, what did you just release? What we were talking about is firm power, therefore there must be a difference if you just released 824 megawatts and there is another number somewhere. If it is sensitive, you would not have released that number, I say, Mr. Speaker.

According to Estimates this morning, government has budgeted close to \$1 million, several hundred thousand dollars, to complete the review of the energy system in our Province. Keep in mind just a couple of years ago they shut down the PUB saying it was a waste of money before we got the DG3 numbers to spend \$2.5 million to let them continue.

I ask the minister: Why are you spending close to \$1 million in taxpayer money, only to duplicate the efforts of the PUB?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DALLEY: Mr. Speaker, there is no defined number; we are going through an RFP process. We have committed to the people of the Province that we are going to help restore confidence in our utility system.

We have committed, as we did in our 2007 Energy Plan, that we are going to move our electrical system into a new era. We are going to come in line with the North American system. We are going to move from an isolated system to an interconnected system. With that, Mr. Speaker, we are committed to take a look at structure, roles and responsibilities, governance, legislation, jurisdiction, regulation, all of those aspects that are important as we go forward.

Mr. Speaker, the PUB is an important stakeholder of our utility system, along with Newfoundland and Labrador Hydro and Newfoundland Power. Surely the member opposite is not suggesting that we let the PUB define their own role in our utility system in this Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, parents and teachers have shown zero support for the so-called no-zero policy previously adopted by the Eastern School District. In the meantime, the Minister of Education has chosen to remain silent on the matter. He has had little or nothing to say on the subject.

I ask the minister: Will he see that his appointed board of trustees does not force this wrong-headed no-zero policy on all of the English schools across Newfoundland and Labrador?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, the policy that the member references is a school board policy. One thing that we can look forward to now with consolidation of the English boards into one is a stable policy across. That is something that the board is working on.

Mr. Speaker, the important thing about this is that I as minister, we as educators, never give up on children. Sometimes there is a need for a second chance. We do not condone cheating or procrastination or anything like that, but sometimes children need a second chance just as adults do.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, as usual, the minister bobs and he weaves. He says very little and he hides behind his appointed trustees.

Parents and teachers have been loud and clear on the no-zero policy. They think it is ridiculous. It penalizes teachers by preventing them from doing their job to the best of their ability. It penalizes students by not teaching them the lessons they need for the real world.

I ask the minister: Will you do the right thing for students and teachers and give this no-zero evaluation policy the failing grade it deserves?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I find the comments of the member – as an educator himself, I am at a loss at his approach to questioning. I am at a loss to his approach to children.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JACKMAN: I will never stand up and defend someone who is cheating or their timelines that you set for students to have projects in, but the premise of the no zero is that we do help children.

Mr. Speaker, if we did not give second chances to people, there would be a lot of us who may not have been successful. This is about never giving up on children, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I give the minister's office a zero these days.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, as a fix for the overcrowding of schools, such as Paradise Elementary and Beachy Cove Elementary, the minister has budgeted for modular classrooms.

I ask the minister: Why doesn't he provide the same financial flexibility to the board to explore more suitable solutions like modulars for schools in Mount Pearl?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I can indicate to the member that we have allocated funds to the school district that will now get on with the planning process in the Mount Pearl system. The work will be done, because, Mr. Speaker, November creeps upon us very quickly. That is when we start to get into our budgetary process, so work needs to be done previous to that.

Mr. Speaker, we have allocated the funds to the school district to start that process.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LANE: Mr. Speaker, I would say to the minister that they needed the funds prior to the decision being made, not after the fact.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, according to the Schools Act, the Cabinet can either appoint a board of trustees or order that there be an election.

I ask the minister: In the interest of openness and democracy, will you immediately call for an election of the school board so that the people of the Province – and not the people of your Cabinet are making important decisions that are disrupting the lives of parents, teachers and students.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, many of these people – let's start first – these are elected trustees. Second, these are volunteers. They put in countless hours and days and months to do what they consider to be right by children.

I find it disrespectful of this member to take advantage of Question Period and to downgrade what these volunteers are trying to do for the children and the people of this Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, yesterday pharmacists met with the Minister of Health to discuss expanded scope of practice for our pharmacists. Most of Canada already has existing or pending legislation for expanded scope. This government will not even negotiate an expanded role.

I ask the minister: Why are you not letting our pharmacists perform to the full scope of their ability, like virtually every other province?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to discussing with the pharmacy association and to working with them to identify opportunities so that they can work to their full scope of practice.

Mr. Speaker, we did receive a discussion document from PANL, it outlines six recommendations. Our department, the Department of Health, has indicated that we are ready to move on all six recommendations, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, there must be a failure or a lack of communication here because pharmacists in this Province are insulted with the way this government is treating them, and this is up until today.

Services such as medication management, flu shot injections, and prescribing for minor ailments are being done in most other provinces.

Again, I ask the minister: When will this government get serious about actually providing pharmacists with a scope of practice that is at least equal to their peers in the rest of Canada?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We are very serious, and that is why the Minister of Health does meet with the pharmacy association. As I said, we were pleased to receive their discussion document where they outlined six recommendations. That includes medical adherence, smoking cessation, expanded medical reviews, self-monitoring of blood glucose, type 2 diabetes, immunizations, and minor ailments. We indicated to PANL that we are ready to move on six of those.

We will be putting a working group together to quickly act on five of them. The sixth one, the minor ailments, requires a larger discussion, Mr. Speaker. It will require discussion with health professionals, but we did indicate we are ready to move on that one as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Mr. Speaker, when asked about the status of the Youth Advisory Committee, the minister deflected, despite an

inactive Web site and no annual reports since 2011. This youth led advisory committee provided a forum for key issues affecting young people of Newfoundland and Labrador and had direct dialogue with government.

I ask the minister: Why is your government moving away from youth engagement by abolishing a youth led committee that was appointed to give you advice on youth programs, services, and policies?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Mr. Speaker, this government is more committed to youth engagement than any government in our history.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: In fact, it is ironic that the member opposite asked a question about youth engagement when his caucus – well the caucus he sits in at the moment anyway – is against a youth engagement initiative that we are bringing into this House of Assembly through Bill 6.

In terms of the Youth Advisory Committee, it has not been active for a period of time. Through the Office of Public Engagement we have conducted a series of youth forums around the Province over the past year. We are in the process of re-launching a new initiative that is going to replace the former Youth Advisory Committee. It is part of our youth engagement strategy. There are more initiatives going on related to young people in this government than ever before.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Mr. Speaker, the only thing that is ironic is this government does not practice what it preaches.

Mr. Speaker, the provincial government should listen to the people of the Province, especially our youth.

I ask the minister: When will your government get serious about youth engagement and establish the provincial Youth Advisory Committee to allow a direct forum with youth in the Province to have their voice heard?

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We are very proud of the initiatives we have undertaken as a government to advance youth engagement and youth involvement, and I would ask the members opposite to reconsider their position. A member stands and asks questions about youth engagement, yet he has berated this government for bringing in an initiative that will allow young people to have a more meaningful voice in local government. It is an initiative we very much believe in and it is going to do great things to advance youth engagement in communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

It is indeed ironic, Mr. Speaker. I would ask the member opposite to reflect on his position and consider his actions in this House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

MR. EDMUNDS: Mr. Speaker, as many as thirty residents living on low incomes are now essentially homeless with the closure of Newman's Boarding House in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. Government and community groups have stepped in to provide some temporary housing.

I ask the Minister Responsible for Poverty Reduction and Housing: What is the long-term solution to help these residents find safe and affordable housing?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: Mr. Speaker, since 2009 we spent about \$15.9 million in the Labrador area in regard to housing initiatives.

My main focus since Monday evening has been on the residents who were displaced out of Newman's. I had my staff on the ground on Tuesday morning and we met with community partners. We addressed the issue in regard to everybody having a place to stay; meals were provided. As well, we have engaged Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and the Friendship Centre, too, Mr. Speaker, for more long-term solutions.

I would like to announce as well in this House today that I have triggered an action team which is going to be made up of senior officials from Advanced Education and Skills, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Torngat Mountains.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. EDMUNDS: Mr. Speaker, we are still waiting for a long-term solution, but I do have an offer. The Paddon Home, a former senior's facility in Goose Bay, has been vacant for four years now. Almost \$1 million was invested in 2011 to repair the roof and the sprinkler system.

I ask the minister: If this work was completed, why are you failing to make this facility available, especially when we have a housing crisis in Lake Melville?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: Mr. Speaker, just to finish where I left off before in the previous question in regard to the action team. Senior officials from Advanced Education and Skills, senior officials from Newfoundland and Housing, senior officials from Health and Community Services, the Nunatsiavut Government are all involved in regard to coming to a solution, a long-term solution for Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

One of the areas we will look at, absolutely, is the Paddon Home. We have been looking at other solutions as well as we partner with community and also the action groups, and especially the Salvation Army in that area, Mr. Speaker.

My focus in on the people who were displaced. I have to take care of that in the interim. Then I have to get to the long-term solution after that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair.

MS DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We are hearing that 147 jobs were cut from the College of the North Atlantic in Qatar yesterday.

I ask the minister: Can you confirm this? If so, how many of these positions were filled by Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, and how many college employees right here in this Province will be bumped as a result?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: Mr. Speaker, it is well-known that the Qatar government made a cut in regard to funding right across all post-secondary sectors in that country about a couple of weeks ago. As

a matter of fact, the University of Calgary closed down, I think, pretty well their entire operations there.

There is a minimal impact to the college and the contract in regard to the College of the North Atlantic in Qatar. It will affect some people. We will absorb most of them in vacancies. There are about twenty Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who will be affected once their contracts are finished. We are evaluating that as well to see what kind of an impact it will have on Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair.

MS DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, the original comprehensive agreement expired in August, 2012. A three-year agreement was announced in early 2013. We submitted an Access to Information request for a copy of the new agreement one year ago but we were denied.

I ask the minister: Now that you claim to be open and transparent, will you provide us with a copy of the renewed, comprehensive agreement between the State of Qatar and the College?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: Mr. Speaker, that particular contract, we did extend the contract for three years. The main contract will be signed very soon. As soon as I get that contract signed, I certainly will endeavour to share it with the hon. member.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yesterday, with the release of the independent engineer's report, we learned finally that the Muskrat Falls Project is not the least-cost option that the provincial government trotted out to the public in order to sell their deal.

I ask the Premier: When is this government going to admit that Muskrat Falls is on the road to becoming a nuisance beaver?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DALLEY: Mr. Speaker, when we started this out we recognized there was a need in this Province for power, a major problem in our future. Our government had a vision that we needed to solve that problem. Added to that we had a commitment to the people of the Province that we are going to need power, we are going to solve a problem, and we are going to find the least-cost way to do that.

Not only did we do that work and Nalcor did the work, the Public Utilities Board had an opportunity. There is a long list of independent reports and reviews that looked at all kinds of options in this Province, what the cost would be, and the conclusion is that the least-cost option is Muskrat Falls. Mr. Speaker, even the Opposition have stood in this House and agreed that there is a need to build Muskrat Falls.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

Here is a bit of reality for the minister; interest during construction was originally estimated to be \$700 million. The independent engineer's report reveals \$1 billion. A review of major hydroelectric dam projects around the world and

in Canada show that costs balloon out of control, which is now happening.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: Is this dam project still the least-cost option?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DALLEY: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. Let me give the Leader of the Third Party a little dose of reality as well. It is the least-cost option; the difference was \$2.4 billion, not \$300,000.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DALLEY: The other thing, Mr. Speaker, I will say to the member opposite, unlike the member opposite we believe in the people in the Newfoundland and Labrador who are going to build that project. We are not building it in Manitoba; we are not building it anywhere else in the world. We are building it right here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I ask the minister: How much will the people of this Province, who he loves so much, have to pay Emera when power is not running to Nova Scotia by 2017?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Minister of Natural Resources.

MR. DALLEY: There is no question; I love my Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DALLEY: There is no question, Mr. Speaker, as minister, and the people in this government, we will do what is right for the people in the Province. We are going to develop resources in this Province so we maximize the benefits, so we can have the best possible deal. The best possible deal and development of our resources out of Muskrat Falls, so we can sell the power and we can make money for the people of the Province.

We are committed to developing the resources for the maximum benefit of the people of the Province. I just wish, Mr. Speaker, that somebody who wants to stand in this Province and be a leader in this Province would at least get behind us and realize that we are developing resources to benefit the people of the Province. Why won't you go along with it?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

I ask the minister: When are they going to admit to the people of this Province how much the dam is really going to cost them, out of their pockets? When are they going to admit it?

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

MR. DALLEY: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite wants a number. I can commit to the people of the Province that they are going to get their numbers; they have a right to know. Mr. Speaker, I explain to the member opposite and I have always believed this, even when I was involved in education, with rights, there are responsibilities. Do people have a right to know that number? Absolutely, and they will; but, Mr. Speaker, there is a responsibility attached to that right. The responsibility rests with this government, rests with me as minister, to make sure that we protect that project, we minimize the cost in every way we can. We are not going to put numbers out there that are going

to negatively impact our negotiating and bargaining position on contracts.

Why is it the members opposite want numbers out there so they can drive the cost of the project? We are committed to the project and we are committed to the people of the Province, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre.

MS ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, the minister is closing three group homes, cutting experienced public servants and uprooting confused, upset, and afraid children. Since after first announcing the Level 4 residential care initiative no one – no one – has told the staff or the children when they will move, where they will live, and who will take care of them.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: Where is his transitional plan for these children? Why has he abdicated his responsibility for the care of these children?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

When the new department was formed in 2009, we brought in services from regional health authorities. As we were developing the department, we were developing new plans, we were developing new legislation and a new policy, the Auditor General made a recommendation. The recommendation, specific to residential services for children and youth, was that we should go through a competitive process. That is the right thing to do, and I agree with the Auditor General.

As a government and being responsible for the provision of services in my department, for

provision of services to children and youth and to ensure we are getting the best value we can and the best product we can, we went through a competitive process. We have done that, Mr. Speaker, and as a result of that we have awarded contracts throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, the children still do not know where and when they will be going. In just six weeks the new houses must be bought, renovated to code, rezoned and furnished, neighbours must be consulted, staff hired and trained, programs set up and vulnerable children prepared to move, and all of this just even before the school year ends.

Mr. Speaker, government had years to prepare. Why is the minister inflicting these drastic changes so suddenly and haphazardly on the children in this manner?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is most unfortunate that the member opposite tries to insinuate that I, as minister, and the people in the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services have nothing less than the best interests of the children and youth in mind. That is what we have, Mr. Speaker.

I can tell you I, as the minister, the people who work in our department, the officials in our department, and the front-line social workers throughout Newfoundland and Labrador have top of mind at all times is the best interest of children. That is what we are seeking here, Mr. Speaker.

We did a competitive process and, in doing so, we wanted to ensure that each individual child,

that opportunities, services and programs were best for those children. That is what we have done, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees

Tabling of Documents

Tabling of Documents

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

MS JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, pursuant to section 26.(5)(a) of the Financial Administration Act, I am tabling three Orders-in-Council relating to funding pre-commitment for the 2015-2016 fiscal year.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

Petitions

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

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

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

WHEREAS Tordon 101 contains the chemicals 2,4-D and Picloram; and

WHEREAS the chemical Picloram is a known cancer-causing carcinogen; and

WHEREAS the provincial government has banned the cosmetic use of the pesticide 2,4-D; and

WHEREAS safer alternatives are available to the provincial government for bush clearance such as manual labour, alternative competitive seeding methods, and/or the mechanical removal of brush; and

WHEREAS the provincial government is responsible for ensuring the safety and well-being of its citizens;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to cease the use of chemicals covered under its own cosmetic pesticide ban and begin using safer methods of brush clearance that will not place the citizens in harm's way.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, this petition is from the people particularly in Central Newfoundland. We can talk about the Central area of the Province. It could be undergoing some brush clearing. Of course, last year it did. We know in the Budget this year, a very good initiative on the part of government, they were showing a \$2 million investment in brush clearing, but we still do not have the answer from government as regards to what they are going to be doing after they clear the brush.

Are they going to move in with equipment after, specialized equipment and end up spraying some very toxic chemicals around these particular areas where they did clear the brush; or is government's policy going to be one of using mechanical methods from now on, which we know are going to be a lot safer? Number two, they can come in and use a competitive growing

method, for example, a plant that might be a little bit more competitive against such types as the alder.

We know there are other ways for government to be combatting the problem of roadside brush. We know it is a safety issue as well when it comes to the clearing of roadside brush. We know their initiative, for example, is directed solely, I think, toward moose management and prevention of moose accidents. We know it is a good initiative to be clearing the stuff from the side of the roads, clearing away brush, but we need them to take a second look at the possibility of poisoning various water supplies and poisoning the environment by using toxic chemicals.

On the part of these people, it is a pleasure to present this petition on their behalf. I want to thank them, as well, for their input into this matter. It is a very important matter. Hopefully government will address it in the future by reducing, if not eliminating, the use of roadside chemicals in brush clearing.

Thank you very much.

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS there are extreme overcrowding issues at St. Peter's Elementary and Mount Pearl Senior High, a direct result of the poor planning by the Department of Education; and

WHEREAS the solution imposed by the English School Board to deal with this now crisis situation will have a devastating impact on many students, families and teachers in Mount Pearl Senior High, Mount Pearl Intermediate, St. Peter's Elementary, and Newtown Elementary; and

WHEREAS there are other less disruptive solutions which can be introduced to alleviate this overcrowding issue including capital investment as a preferred option as well as catchment area realignment; and

WHEREAS the English School Board was not provided with the financial flexibility by the Minister of Education to explore other more suitable options; and

WHEREAS the government has intervened in board decisions in the past such as in 2005 in Bishop's Falls, reversing the closure of Leo Burke Academy;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to intervene in this matter, commit appropriate resources to the English School Board, and instruct them to develop more suitable options –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Day

MR. SPEAKER: This being Wednesday, Private Members' Day, our Standing Orders call us at 3:00 p.m. to go directly to the member whose motion is on the Order Paper.

I call on the hon. the Member for Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi.

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

I move the following resolution, seconded by the Member for St. John's East:

WHEREAS more than two-thirds of minimum wage earners in Newfoundland and Labrador are women, and one-fourth of minimum wage earners are the sole earners in their household; and

WHEREAS the minimum wage is inadequate and does not provide enough money for the necessities of life because a person earning minimum wage working forty hours a week makes \$20,800 a year which is barely above the Low Income Cut-Off of \$19,496, and a working couple with two children are also close to low income; and

WHEREAS in 2012 the Minimum Wage Review Committee recommended an increase in the minimum wage in 2013 to reflect the loss of purchasing power since 2010, and an annual adjustment beginning in 2014 to reflect the Consumer Price Index; and

WHEREAS the provincial government instead legislated two 25-cent increases, one in October 2014 and one in October 2015, with no indexing; and

WHEREAS other provinces and territories are continuing to raise their minimum wage, and six now have a higher minimum wage than Newfoundland and Labrador;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the House of Assembly urge government to legislate an increase in the minimum wage in 2014 to reflect the loss of purchasing power since 2010, and make an annual adjustment to the minimum wage beginning in 2015 to reflect the Consumer Price Index.

I am very pleased, Mr. Speaker, to be able to bring this issue to the floor of the House of Assembly. I thank in advance my colleagues in the House for what I believe will be a good discussion in this House, a debate that recognizes the issues that are being raised in this resolution.

We all know – or people watching may not know – that there are regular reviews of the minimum wage according to legislation. In 2012, the government received the report from the latest Minimum Wage Review Committee with regard to the minimum wage in this Province.

This government had taken a step forward in 2010 and had made changes to our minimum wage which really brought us up in the country in terms of where we stood. We were almost a leader in this country with regard to our minimum wage. Now after four years of nothing happening, we have slipped to seventh position with six provinces ahead of us when it comes to the minimum wage.

Mr. Speaker, as the resolution said, in this Province two-thirds of minimum wage earners in Newfoundland and Labrador are women, and one-fourth of minimum wage earners are the sole earners in their household, and many of those are single women. The issue is one of so many people working long hours, and some of them working more than one job, because their jobs are minimum wage jobs and the minimum wage is so low, that one job just does not bring in enough money to cover the needs of the wage earner and the wage earner's family. The number of people – and I do not have a statistic on this one, it is one that is harder to get – who hold down more than one job is very high when you are talking to people who are on minimum wage.

The other day, Mr. Speaker, I was being served by somebody in the service industry who was doing a great job and in chatting with her I discovered she had just come off work in the hospital at Eastern Health where she has a full-time job, and was now working her second job in the service industry. This is what is going on, Mr. Speaker. We have people working for minimum wage or next to minimum wage and cannot keep things together. They have to work more than one job.

We even have students who are holding down – being in college or being at the university – also more than one job. Because they cannot even get a full-time job that would give them enough money, they have to take part-time work. The combination of part-time work, and the minimum wage is almost right on the low income cut-off, the combination of those two things means we have thousands of people in this Province who are working morning, noon

and night and just managing to hold things together.

Low income salaries do not provide enough money for the necessities of life. You have low-income working people who are going to food banks because they do not earn enough money to be able to feed their families adequately, clothe their families, and take care of all of the needs of the family.

Economically, it makes sense to have people earning better salaries. People at the low end of the scale, Mr. Speaker, do not get to save money. Even if the minimum wage went up right away today, even by \$1, the people getting that minimum wage would still be spending every cent they earn. They would be spending every cent, and the money they earn would be going back into the pockets of people who are running businesses.

Mr. Speaker, the government had an opportunity. They had a wonderful committee, an objective committee, of learned people in place who made solid recommendations to government, and this government ignored those recommendations. Now, I went over the answer from the minister when I raised this issue in a Question Period here in this House, and the minister proudly said that they do not have to listen to recommendations.

Well, Mr. Speaker, I do not know why they bother to put a committee in place that has expertise on it, and that takes the time – because they had been appointed to do it – to look at all the factors, and then puts together learned recommendations and then to have a minister say well, we do not have to listen to their recommendations.

The recommendations from the committee pointed out that because the last increase in minimum wage had been 2010, by the time they were studying the situation, people had lost money because of course inflation was going ahead. Cost of living was moving ahead while they were at a standstill. They were at a standstill of a minimum wage that was poverty level.

So, their first recommendation was extremely important. Their first recommendation was government had to bring the minimum wage up, and what they wanted the government to bring it up to was a wage, in 2014, in this year, that would reflect the loss of purchasing power since 2010. No, actually they said 2013 because they were doing the study back in 2012 – so that in 2013, they wanted government to bring the wage up to in 2013 to a level that reflected the loss of power since 2010. It is now 2014, that has not happened. They then wanted government, from that new point, to start indexing minimum wage every year.

So already people on minimum wage are two years behind – two more years behind, because the report came out in 2012. What government has opted to do it in this fall of 2014 they are going to put up the minimum by twenty-five cents – which is a pittance, after these people who are minimum wage losing four years of purchasing power. Then it is only committing itself to another twenty-five cents the following year. They are not even looking at the indexing. I do not want them indexing at the low level, because indexing at the low level would make no sense. They did that, by the way, at one point, with Income Support, and they have even dropped that.

So this government is showing that it does not have concern for people who are living in poverty and living on the edge. They have no concern for people who are working fifty and sixty hours a week on minimum wages trying to survive. I cannot understand where they are thinking is and it is going to be very interesting for me to hear today what their response is going to be, because I have not been impressed over the past years in any responses they have made on this issue, Mr. Speaker.

That is why this resolution is calling for this year, in 2014, for the government to change its position and recognize the need to bring the minimum wage up to represent the loss of purchasing power since 2010, and then next year to start indexing. I know they have not done it in their Budget, but they have reversed all kinds of decisions that they have recognized are

wrong. I would ask them to recognize how wrong this one is.

Poverty is one of the contributors to ill health. It is one of the indicators of health recognized by anybody who studies health and the issues of good health. The longer that we keep people living in poverty, the longer we will have people who are not in good health, people who are spending a lot of time going to the medical system to get help because they are ill – and this government has not even done, I do not think, a cost-benefit analysis to the government and to the public purse of what it would mean to bring up the minimum wage. What would happen is that we would start getting people being healthier, because they now have a greater ability to take care of their needs. They would be healthier because they would be able to put more money into feeding themselves and their families good food, and we would see a change in the use of our health care system.

This government has not done any analysis like that, Mr. Speaker, which really disturbs me. This is the kind of lack of long-term planning that I keep talking about in this House of Assembly, that I see exhibited by this government. A cost-benefit analysis would show them that putting up the minimum wage would be a benefit to the economy for all kinds of reasons. One, as I have already mentioned, because they have more money in their pocket they put that money right back into the economy; they have no choice. They have to; it helps them continue living a better life, the money goes back in.

Secondly, we would see an improvement in the cost of our health care system. Third, Mr. Speaker, you would see people being able to work. Right now we hear many stories of people, especially women with children they are trying to raise on their own, who do not take on a job at the low minimum wage. They are actually on income assistance because on income assistance at least they are getting some other benefits that are helping them.

Mr. Speaker, it makes absolutely no sense for government to continue down the path it is

going. Going down this path, we will not have six provinces and Territories ahead of us; we will have ten or eleven ahead of us in two years' time at the rate this government is moving.

I noticed that in July 2010 when the wage reached \$10 an hour and government sat back on its laurels, the Minister Responsible for AES noted, ““This increase is another way the Williams Government is improving the quality of life of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians... Increasing the minimum wage helps individuals and families achieve increased self-reliance and contributes to a stronger provincial economy.”” It has to move beyond where it is, Mr. Speaker, because being right on the edge of the low income cut-off point is not helping people.

Take, for example, this year. This is not the minimum wage; this is people on Income Support. They are going to have maybe another \$106 in their pocket with the increase that was made. What is that, Mr. Speaker? One hundred and six dollars approximately – I might not have the figure right, but that it is almost it – a year is nothing. It is nothing. It is the same way with minimum wage. Put the minimum wage up twenty-five cents next fall is nothing.

This government keeps talking about how they care about the people in this Province. Well, you know they do not, or they do not understand what the life really is for people who are living in poverty. They really do not understand what it is for a single-parent mom to be holding down two jobs. I have met them. Have they met them? They are in their districts; I have met them in their districts. I have spoken to the people in their districts. Why are they not talking to them? Why are they not listening to them? These people exist everywhere in the Province, Mr. Speaker.

A raise in the minimum wage, some people sometimes say and I have heard people from the opposite side of the House say, is hard on small business. You see, you find other ways to intervene to help small business. They have taken a small step this year in the Budget, and I am glad they have done it, by dropping the small business income tax to 3 per cent from 4 per

cent. I hope they are going to do what we would do, and that is get it down to zero. That way, you are helping small business deal with having fairer salaries for people who are working for them.

All of that, Mr. Speaker, helps the economy, but you have to have a plan, you have to have analysis. You have to be forward looking in order to see how all of that works, and this is what this government does not seem to understand.

An increase to the minimum wage have helped young workers, women, workers over fifty-five. These are the people who absolutely need to be helped. Without increases in the minimum wage women will be falling seriously behind.

They like to tout that we have made great strides with regard to poverty in this Province. We have not, Mr. Speaker, we have not. When you take the statistics and read them the way they are written, we have not. We have people suffering in this Province, we have people working in poverty, we have lineups at our food banks that are growing, and there is not a community in this Province that I have been in, that does not have a food bank, Mr. Speaker.

We have to make this change. This government has to see that this change is necessary. I find it very difficult when I see blinkers on them, of course we see it around a lot of things, but this one in particular really makes me upset. The minimum wage is an important policy lever that a government can use. It is not going to take money out of their pockets, Mr. Speaker. This is what I do not understand.

My time is up. Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you for reminding me, and I will get a chance to speak at the end of the debate.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. S. COLLINS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am happy to stand to discuss this topic today. I can say in all sincerity, Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to be part of a government that has taken such a role in helping those low-income earners and people on fixed income. While I go through my notes today, I will refer to this group as low-income earners, but of course that includes fixed income as well as others.

I just want to talk a little bit about the Budget issue. Certainly, we can look at this Budget in how it has addressed so many needs for those low-income earners. That is something that is not exclusive to this Budget. If you look over the past decade, since this government took power in 2003 there has been a huge amount of initiatives and different policies that have worked for people, low-income people, and we have heard it.

As MHAs we have to be very genuine here and we have to say – there are issues out there, sure there are issues, but there are also people who are very happy with the things we have done, and things that have made real change in people's lives. We hear that every day. So it is very important to acknowledge that.

In ten years of hard work, ten years of a lot of good decisions, there are years ahead of us. There are still things to do and we acknowledge that, but we are on the right path and we have made huge differences in people's lives. It is something that I am very proud of this government, proud to be part of it. As a government, of course, it is incumbent on us to care for the most vulnerable.

It was great; I attended the new Premier's inaugural speech, I guess you would call it, down at Government House. It seems to be a long time ago now but it was not really that very long ago. Premier Marshall, what he said was very poignant, especially when it comes to this discussion. He said, "So let us ensure that the fight against poverty and inequality intensifies in our province and we never forget the needs of those who are aged, who have disabilities, who are infirmed, and who live on fixed and low incomes."

That was one of his mainstays. That was one of his touchstones. When he got up and spoke at that inaugural speech, his very first speech to the public that is what he hung his hat on. I thought it was so refreshing. It was great. It just feeds into all the work we have been doing over the last ten years, but it is very important as a government that has been in power for such a long time, to remember those things.

For him to state that, and really be the main crux of his message, I think was really assuring to me, he is someone who really thinks this is important. I am sure I speak for a number of colleagues on this side of the House when I say that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. S. COLLINS: Mr. Speaker, minimum wage is just one piece of the equation. While the Leader of the NDP can rise and say minimum wage, it has to be done, we have to raise it this amount. It is very short-sighted, it is very narrow-minded to just take one thing, one item and say we have to fix this. Then by extension to say: If we raise the minimum wage it will be great for the economy.

What a thing to say. How far has she thought that through? Because while it is a very important piece, it is not the only piece. If you ask small and medium-sized businesses in particular how minimum wage affects their business, it has a huge impact. We have to take a balanced approach. We cannot simply go out and raise it through the roof; no other jurisdiction has. Currently, we sit at sixth in the country.

I also remind people watching at home, and I am sure many people would know this, the difference between sixth place and first place is very minimal. We are not talking \$5 or \$10. We are talking in many cases, cents, twenty-five cents, fifty cents. While we are sixth today, in a very short amount of time we are going to be up to number two. That is thirteen jurisdictions right across the country.

We are making strides. The fact remains that even right now as it stands today, we are in the middle of the pack. In the middle of the pack is not the place we want to be. We want to be even more progressive, and that is why we are raising the minimum wage again. Again, something I am very proud of that we are doing and it is nice to recognize that minimum wage is but one piece; a very important piece but one piece.

What we have done as a government, we have taken a broad standpoint. We have looked at this from 30,000 feet we will say. That is kind of what we have looked at. Of course, when you are on the government side there are a number of departments and there are a number of ways you can effect positive change for low-income earners. It is not simply by raising the minimum wage.

I will also say to the members across the way, raising the minimum wage does not necessarily cost government money. It is not a monetary attachment. It is not like we are saying: Well, we cannot do that because it is going to cost us on our bottom line. It is a fact about taking a balanced approach. What we have done and what has gone on our bottom line is the number of social programs. Some of those things I want to talk about here today.

Before I go into some of the issues I want to touch on with regard to health care, I wanted to just state for the record here, minimum wage will be increased to \$10.25 on October 1, 2014 and to \$10.50 on October 1, 2015. This constitutes a 75 per cent increase in just ten years – 75 per cent in a decade, a huge increase.

Then we go a step further. Right now no province in Canada has a minimum wage of \$10.50. In fact, only two territories have a rate that is higher than that. That really gives you a perspective as to where we are in the Confederation, I will say.

We have been a leader on minimum wage increases in the country and will continue to be one. While we may again be currently in sixth place, we are a leader. We are going to come up even further than that. I would say we are a

leader as opposed to a follower. That is something that I am oh so proud of.

Let's take a look at some of the programs. When I asked to speak to this private member's resolution, I did so thinking that I wanted to talk from a health perspective. We all know how massive the Department of Health is. We know how much of the Budget is consumed by the Department of Health. You have a \$3 billion budget; every single dollar affects every single person it seems in this Province. Nothing could be even more accurate to say that it affects low-income earners. A lot of our programs are particularly focused and to be able to cause positive impact on low-income earners.

In particular, one of the things that really jumps out at me – I looked at a bunch of different ones, but one of the ones that really stands out to me is the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program, the NLPDP. This is something that has come a huge way in the last number of years. It is something that did not exist anything near this, there was not even a shadow of a comparison to this program in years past. It is something that affects many people.

I go back to the fact that as an MHA you get to speak to constituents, you get phone calls on a daily basis from people with issues with regard to hospital stays, or transportation, or medications, whatever the case is. It is great to be able to reply to that person: Do you know what? I think we have a program that can help you. So many times I find myself saying that, and it is so good to see. It is tangible results. You hear from these people who are able to keep money in their pocket, and in many cases money they did not have in their pocket. They are able to get life-sustaining medication. That is a program I am very proud of.

I just want to talk a little bit about the NLPDP. It provides financial assistance for the purchase of eligible prescription medications to over 130,000 residents of Newfoundland and Labrador. About less than one-quarter I suppose, but 130,000 residents of Newfoundland and Labrador avail of this program. Budget 2014 provides a total investment in the

Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program of \$147 million. This brings our administrative investment to over \$1.3 billion since 2004. One decade, \$1.3 billion into prescription drugs. Now, I did not hear the member talk about that one particular thing, but maybe that was simply an oversight.

So, I will tell her a little bit more about the NLPDP. So there are five portions of the program, and three of those five specifically target and offer assistance to our vulnerable populations and those living on low incomes.

The Foundation Plan, as many of us are aware, provides 100 per cent coverage of benefit items for persons and families in receipt of Income Support, children in the care of Child, Youth and Family Services, including services in Youth Corrections, certain individuals receiving services through the regional health authorities through community supports, and individuals who are subsidized residents of long-term care and personal care homes. So that, in itself, is a huge group.

There is a second piece to that as well: the 65Plus Plan. Another piece that has been so well received; I have heard so many people say, obviously, they are availing of the benefits. This provides coverage of eligible prescription drugs to residents sixty-five years of age or older who receive OAS benefits and the Guaranteed Income Supplement. There is no specific application for this. If you are in receipt of those things, you automatically qualify. That coverage caps the co-pay to \$6 per prescription. If you are filling as a senior, a lot of times seniors have a number of different prescriptions – being able to cap that at \$6 can save quite a few dollars over the run of a year. Again, it is greatly appreciated. Why do I know that? Because I hear from my constituents who have told me.

The third piece, the Access Plan, provides access to eligible prescription drugs to individuals and families with low incomes. The amount of coverage is determined by net income level and family status. So beneficiaries, Mr. Speaker, pay a co-pay of between 20 per cent and 70 per

cent of the eligible prescription costs. The lower the income, the lower the co-pay. So again, that is a sliding scale; the less the money you make, the less you pay for your prescription drugs.

Again, that is something that is affecting quite a few lives in Newfoundland and Labrador. Something that I know myself and a number of colleagues of mine has lobbied for. When we sit around the caucus table and we have these frank discussions, we will bring back what we hear in our districts. Something that we had heard, and I know I have heard from a number of people, I have heard from a number of constituents – and I am so glad that in Budget 2014 \$700,000 has been provided to extend drug card coverage for residents on Income Support under the Prescription Drug Program from six months to a year to help with that transition into a job as such.

So, before a lot of people would say gee, I would like to go back into the workforce, but I have my drug costs and they are so high, and just to have that six-month period it is a little bit rough, if we could only get a transition period that was a bit longer. That is what we have done; we have provided \$700,000, and that has extended that from six months to twelve months. That allows a person who is re-entering the workforce to have one year, they still have prescription drug coverage, and it allows them to transition.

Again, we talk about low income and we talk about raising the minimum wage. If you ask me, my main thing is not to have someone cope, living on minimum wage; it is to give them the opportunities to try to get out of that situation and to make it even better for themselves. I know my colleague for Advanced Education and Skills is going to be speaking and he will be talking, I am sure, to some of those programs.

It is short-sighted to just say raise the minimum wage. That is an important piece, do not get me wrong – that is a very important piece – but there is also a piece of it of what else we can do for them with regard to social programs that will affect each and every one of them. Even more importantly, Mr. Speaker, as I said, how can we

provide them with the opportunity so they can take themselves out of a position where it is less than ideal? How can we raise them up and make sure they are able to provide a living for themselves and their families that is not only sustainable but enjoyable? I think that is what we all try to provide.

I want to speak quickly about the Adult Dental Program. This one here is another great program. The provincial government invests \$6.7 million into the Adult Dental Program to provide select diagnosis and therapeutic dental services to individuals enrolled in three plans, which I just mentioned under NLPDP. In Budget 2014, that continues. The only difference is, of course, we have taken the cap that was previously set at \$150 and we have bumped that up to \$200, so it allows people going in and getting dental work – for people on low income getting dental work that cap now has increased \$50 to \$200.

If you listen to the Member for Burgeo – La Poile, you would think it is an archaic program and it must be the worst in the country. Nothing could be further from the truth because if you look at it this program has been extremely successful and it is one of the most comprehensive dental programs in Canada. You have to put perspective – I hear my good friend rise on his feet a number of times and talk about the Adult Dental Program and talk about how horrible it is. The fact remains we are one of the leaders in Canada.

I can tell you again, I am sure the people across the way must talk to constituents. They must hear it. Of course, you can take any program in any government and pick pieces out of it and say: This could be improved; this could be made a little bit better. That is fine. We understand that. Every program is not perfect, but this is a program that is making differences.

Who is it making a difference in? Mr. Speaker, it is making a difference in those who cannot afford the dental work. We understand. I have sat around tables before and I have heard the comment made: Dental health is so important to your own personal health. That is something we

recognize and that is why we contribute over \$6 million a year to that program.

Again, that program remains the same; the funding remains the same. I have heard from members before the program was cut. Nothing could be further from the truth. It has always been this amount invested in it and it is going to remain that way. Like I said, we have given a little bit more wiggle room where we can add that \$50 so it increases the amount of work these people can get done.

I have two minutes left and one of the last things – I have a number of things here, but one of things I was very happy with this year was something that was new to the Budget. It is something – again, I seem repetitive when I say I have heard it, but I have heard it from so many constituents: the smoking cessation program. How wonderful is this? You talk about return on investment and being able to spend money better. We are investing in people, and this is again focused on low-income earners. We are investing in their health. If someone can take a treatment program and be able to quit smoking, the effects on the health care system down the road are immense. I think we would all agree with that, of course. Budget 2014 includes \$712,000 for a provincial Smoking Cessation Medication Program for people living on low incomes.

Eligible clients who wish to use this program will require a prescription from a physician, obviously, and the thing is we will subsidize access to these medications for clients and they will be required to contribute \$25 per month. Now if anybody knows, I do not smoke personally but I know how much a pack of tobacco is; \$25 would probably get you a couple of packs, I suppose. Anybody who is a heavy smoker, or even a moderate smoker, smoking a half pack or a pack a day, you can see how many hundreds of dollars you spend in a month.

We are asking them to take a small portion – personal responsibility because everyone has to have that – pay your \$25 and we will provide this medication for you. With the hopes that you will be able to quit and you will no longer

smoke, and obviously the increase financially to someone as well as their health, the benefits are massive.

I only have thirty-nine seconds left so I will start to tie up – I guess, it is about time, but I just want to talk about the fact that we talk about the Poverty Reduction Strategy. We have a strategy that has been touted from East Coast to West Coast to North Coast. We have something to be so proud of in this Poverty Reduction Strategy. I was kind of blown away to see the actual number of what has been spent over the last number of years. We are actually up over \$1 billion spent on poverty reduction. Again, that is not just minimum wage, because that is a piece and a very important piece, but there is a whole umbrella of programs and policies that we consider when looking at this.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will take my seat; I see my time is up. Thank you so much for the opportunity.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a pleasure for me to have an opportunity to speak to this private member's motion. Back in 2012, I wrote a brief for the group that was reviewing the minimum wage and I will talk a little bit about what I had recommended and what I had suggested at the time. I looked at a lot of the research around the minimum wage that had been done, the economics.

It is a fairly important issue for me. It is an important issue for me as well because I have a significant number of constituents in the District of St. John's North who earn minimum wage and that is the income that supports their household. I also have a large number of constituents who are employers, who are operators of small- and medium-sized enterprises who employ people who earn minimum wage, so I can see that there needs to be a balance when it comes to this issue, and I

think it is important to view it from that lens, one that respects that it has multiple implications for different constituencies.

I have more of a personal perspective on this as well, not only because the first job I ever had was a minimum wage job – because when I grew up my parents were small business people and I remember my mother working so incredibly hard; twenty-seven years she stood on her feet behind a cash register operating our family business in the community of Lord's Cove. I remember how little time my mother had to spend with us because she worked for such long hours. For every person who she took on to help operate the store, that person was an earner of minimum wage.

I remember from a very young age conversations around the dinner table about minimum wage increasing and the cost of running a small family business in rural Newfoundland. I do not look at this just based on the literature and the research that I have done myself, or from a political perspective, it also is a very personal matter to me. I just wanted to say that off the top.

We know that minimum wage workers in Canada and in Newfoundland and Labrador tend to be younger workers between the ages of twenty-five – a significant portion of them between the ages of twenty-five and fifty-four as well. Those jobs are concentrated mainly in the hospitality and service sectors. A lot of people work at fast food restaurants and other establishments that serve food. They would be earning minimum wage. Some people are more fortunate obviously if they are working in the hospitality industry and they get tips, gratuities; they, fortunately, are able to make a little bit more.

The way the minimum wage is set across the country is significantly variable and it is interesting as a result that there is such a small difference on whole terms between the absolute values of minimum wage because the ways that they are set are so different. In Nova Scotia, the minimum wage is tied to Statistic Canada's low-income cut-off and that is a standard poverty

measure used in Canada. That low-income cut-off represents people who are devoting a disproportionately larger amount of their income to paying for basic necessities, food, shelter, and clothing.

In the Yukon Territory, interestingly enough, they have something that is closer to what was recommended for our Province. They tie their annual increase in the minimum wage – so it increases manually – to the increases in the Consumer Price Index, so increases in inflation for the City of Whitehorse which is the capital, obviously, of that Territory.

While we have seen a whole lot of different research on the minimum wage, by and large economists are of the opinion as a whole that having a minimum wage substantially benefits low-wage workers. Over the business cycle, if you will, there are few long-term significant negative effects for the economy.

I did read that in 2006, 650 economists from around the world, including five Nobel Prize winners, got together and issued a statement saying that the minimum wage increases can significantly improve the lives of low-income workers and their families without the adverse effects that have been claimed by some critics. I think that is also important.

One recent analysis, a macro analysis – so a study that looks at a whole bunch of different studies – study looked at sixty-four different minimum wage studies that have been conducted. They said, "...if there is some adverse employment effect from minimum-wage raises, it must be of a small and policy-irrelevant magnitude." I think that is an important point.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business has frequently commented on the issue and it is their role to do so. My family, my parents were always a member of that organization, the CFIB, the whole time they operated their business. They have said on occasion that it would result in employers having to lay off workers. I do not dispute that may be the case in some instances. I am sure that is the case in some instances, but this

particular macro analysis said that over a long term it is sort of an infinitesimally small impact.

Regular increases in the minimum wage benefit the economy – in part, because it increases overall buying power. So, low-wage workers, they will spend their new earnings on basic needs. Because, remember, a lot of people who are living at or under or near the low-income cut-off, they are spending the bulk, a disproportionately large portion of their income on basic needs. So, you want to remember that.

They will spend their new earnings on basic needs and services delivered by local businesses. So you think about convenience stores, like my parents had, laundromats and local businesses like those sorts of family-run retail shops, neighbourhood grocery stores, local restaurants, local pizza joints, and the gas station on the corner. Those funds are funnelled back through local businesses, and there are lots to indicate that is the case.

There is a good argument to be made for keeping up with the cost of living, no doubt. The cost of food, we have seen that rise. No doubt, it is associated with the rise that we have seen in transportation costs. We have seen the price of fuel spike and come back down a bit, but we are far from the days of \$25-a-barrel oil now, and it is unlikely that we are ever, ever going to go back to anything resembling that again.

Electricity is going up and, of course, with the Muskrat Falls mega-debt project that we were talking about in Question Period again today, we can expect that by producing electricity for the benefit of the people of Nova Scotia, we are going to have significantly higher electricity costs for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, because we have to foot the bill for the people of Nova Scotia to have more affordable electricity. So we know that is going to go up in the long term.

Rents are going up. We have seen that the vacancy rate for rental apartments has gone way down in recent years. Back in the 1990s when I was out sowing my wild oats and being an

instudious university student, and being more interested in my social life than I was in the things that today I realize are important, the vacancy rate in the City of St. John's was very high. It was easy to get an apartment, and it was easy to get a reasonably affordable apartment, too. The vacancy rate was up to around 13 per cent, 14 per cent. Now the vacancy rate has gone way down. While some of the new projects we have seen, like the new university residences and so on, have added some to the rental housing market, we still have a lot of pressures. Of course, that has driven up the average monthly rent for two bedroom apartments and three bedroom apartments.

I have a lot of people who are renting in the District of St. John's North, around the Prince of Wales area, the Baird Subdivision; if you go up through Grovesdale Park in Kenmount Terrace, around Crosbie Road, the Wishingwell area, all of those areas. Near the university and the north end of Rabbittown there are a lot of rental apartments. While there are some decent rental apartments, I have seen a lot of people living in horrific circumstances; circumstances that I have often questioned whether or not they are up to the city code and have had cause to act on that.

Another problem we have had with respect to housing is that the dream of new home ownership for people has been a much more difficult dream to realize in recent years because we know that while many have benefited from our natural resource wealth and significant business activity that is associated with that, not everybody is able to afford the same creature comforts as everyone else. So while the housing market has taken off, not everybody has been able to keep up.

I also wanted to say a little bit about child care because I do know, and I am a young father myself, and there are a number of young fathers here in the House of Assembly, they will know what I am talking about. The cost of child care is a significant household expense. I have constituents in the District of St. John's North who have children, many of them are working families and they have to pay upwards of \$750 per month per child for decent, quality child

care. I would say that is far from affordable for the average income earner.

If you think about people who are earning minimum wage, we have people who are trapped in cycles of poverty in our communities because it is impossible to – if a person is on Income Support, and I have spoken to many of those people in my district, they are on Income Support and they are trying to get off. They have two children and sometimes three children. If they are single parents, it is impossible. It is not practical to get off Income Support and go work in a minimum-wage job. There is a lot more we need to do in that respect, I say to the Minister of Finance. There is a lot more we need to do to help those people.

There is a variety of different ways that can be done, like continuing to improve the subsidy. There was an economist, I went to see him speak last week, I believe it was, an economist from the Université du Québec à Montréal who was down here talking about it. Craig Alexander, who is the chief economist for TD Bank of Canada, was also here and talked about the economic benefits of providing better child care and how that basically helps more people get into the workforce.

All of the studies and economic analysis around this points in one direction, not only the fact that for every dollar we invest in affordable child care we get upwards of \$1 back, some of those econometric analyses have suggested it is up almost to \$3, which is a significant investment. As I have said here in the House of Assembly before, find the mutual fund that you can get your RRSP invested in that is delivering that rate of return and there will be lineups around the block trying to get in to get that.

It is a great investment to make. It makes a lot of sense. More women would be working and more people would be able to pull themselves up out of poverty.

I could say a lot more, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Verge): Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Port au Port.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CORNETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, before I get into my debate mode this afternoon, I just want to correct the hon. Member for St. John's North who just alluded to the fact that a person coming off Income Support and going into the workforce with a family of three cannot avail of child care services. It is fully covered, I tell the hon. member. It is fully covered, I tell the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CORNETT: Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure and privilege to stand this afternoon and speak to the private member's resolution as put forward by the NDP. An increase in the minimum wage is just one of the ways our government is supporting and improving the lives of low-income residents in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to stand this afternoon to speak about the investments in Budget 2014 for the Poverty Reduction Strategy. Mr. Speaker, this government has demonstrated a dedicated commitment to support those most vulnerable in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Department of Advanced Education and Skills touches the lives of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians on many levels. Essentially, this department is about helping people, Mr. Speaker, whether it is through student aid, skills training, poverty reduction, and various social and economic supports. When services are needed, I tell the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, when services are needed we are there to help.

The provincial Poverty Reduction Strategy is a comprehensive, integrated, and long-term approach to the prevention, reduction, and alleviation of poverty. Our goal is to improve the health, living conditions, education, incomes, and overall well-being of vulnerable people throughout our Province. By all available measures of low income, Newfoundland and Labrador is seeing a significant improvement in reducing the overall level of poverty in our Province.

Mr. Speaker, before our Poverty Reduction Strategy was put in place, Newfoundland and Labrador had an incidence of poverty that was above the national average. Today, the incidence of poverty here is below the national average and our Poverty Reduction Strategy is considered to be a model for others to follow.

The provincial government has always known that fighting poverty would be challenging. We recognize that poverty is a complex issue, Mr. Speaker, and that is why we are taking a long-term approach to combat it. We have put forward investments and initiatives that support a three-pronged approach, preventing people from living in poverty, reducing the number of people living in poverty, and alleviating the poverty experienced by vulnerable people.

Mr. Speaker, as my hon. friend from the District of Terra Nova alluded to earlier; approximately \$170 million was announced in Budget 2014 as a total investment in the Poverty Reduction Strategy. That, Mr. Speaker, is to support the provincial government's long-term approach to combatting poverty that has now surpassed \$1 billion since 2006.

This historic investment includes \$4.8 million to raise the basic rate for people receiving Income Support by 5 per cent beginning July 1 of this year, with a projected investment of \$32.3 million over the following five years. This raise in the basic rate will put more money in the pockets of those who need it the most.

Mr. Speaker, there will also be an increase to the Seniors' Benefit. The maximum payment seniors will receive in the October 2014

payment will be the highest ever at \$1,036, up from \$971 back in 2013.

Mr. Speaker, the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation and the provincial government will again partner with the Government of Canada to extend the \$68 million investment in Affordable Housing Agreement for an unprecedented five years. This agreement also extends the Provincial Home Repair Program and that assists 2,100 households with low incomes to repair their homes. When they can get grants from the provincial government to help to repair their homes that is keeping money in the pockets of low-income earners in the Province.

Mr. Speaker, Budget 2014 also provides \$12 million over three years to extend the Residential Energy Efficiency Program, better known as REEP, across the Province. This program will assist up to 1,000 low-income homeowners per year with energy retrofits that will significantly improve affordability by reducing heating costs. When you can get subsidies and grants from the provincial government to retrofit your home, that again is putting money and keeping money in the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Mr. Speaker, a further \$1 million was added to the Rent Supplement Program, bringing the total annual allocation to \$9 million. This program supports individuals and families on low incomes and individuals with complex needs by paying the portion of their rent that exceeds 25 per cent of their net household income directly to their landlord. It also helps Newfoundland and Labrador Housing address its application list. Again, when we can subsidize rent, that is putting and keeping money in the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

This government, Mr. Speaker, is concerned about homelessness in Newfoundland and Labrador; \$500,000 announced in Budget 2014 gives additional funding for the Supportive Living Program for a total annual investment of \$5.3 million to address homelessness.

Mr. Speaker, the Home Modification Program will be extended with \$9 million over the next three years to provide financial assistance to homeowners with disabilities or seniors with low to moderate incomes who require accessibility changes to their residences. Budget 2014 also contributes \$350,000 to a partnership with the Nunatsiavut Government to assist low-income private homeowners in Nunatsiavut complete major renovations.

Also, Mr. Speaker, \$100,000 has been allocated for the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Community Centre Summer Employment Program. This program encourages twenty-four at-risk youth to continue their education and career paths.

This government, Mr. Speaker, is also working hard to advance inclusion and remove barriers for persons with disabilities. A key focus of the Poverty Reduction Strategy has been to remove barriers and disincentives to employment and increase the inclusiveness of our education system. This will mean more people can take advantage of employment opportunities and benefit from and contribute to the economic prosperity of our Province. Budget 2014 includes \$12.6 million to advance inclusion and support employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Mr. Speaker, the expected signing of a new four-year Labour Market Agreement for Persons with Disabilities will see a \$12 million annual investment from the provincial government supported by a federal government investment of \$4.6 million. This program will assist individuals with a disability to acquire the skills, the experience, and the necessary support to successfully prepare for, enter, or remain in the workforce.

Mr. Speaker, let me talk about the Vehicle Accessibility Program and Inclusion Grants. That will be supported by a \$600,000 investment from Budget 2014. The Vehicle Accessibility Program will provide up to \$25,000 for vehicle retrofits to address transportation barriers for persons who have mobility-related disabilities. If they have a job to go to and they want to

retrofit their vehicle so they can successfully get to their workplace, we have programs and grants to assist them as well. Inclusion Grants will provide up to \$25,000 to non-profit, community-based organizations to enhance the accessibility of their facilities and events.

Mr. Speaker, something that is dear to my heart and dear to the heart of this government is our commitment to students. Our commitment to students remains firm. In fact, this past year some 12,000 students and youth benefited from our employment programs and 20,000 students are supported through our ongoing tuition freeze.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CORNETT: To be sure that our students, Mr. Speaker, have access to a high-quality, affordable education Budget 2014 commits \$14.7 million for two years to eliminate provincial student loans, with a projected investment of approximately \$50.6 million over the next five years.

Mr. Speaker, approximately 7,000 students annually are expected to receive upfront grant assistance to help them access post-secondary education. With the complete elimination of provincial student loans and replacement with upfront needs-based grants, students will see a significant reduction in the amount to be repaid as a student loan. The only loan to be paid back will be a Canada Student Loan. Since 2005 we have invested more than \$282 million to freeze tuitions, making Newfoundland and Labrador students the envy of the country with some of the lowest – lowest, Mr. Speaker – tuition fees and the best Student Aid program in Canada.

As I stated earlier, when it comes to reducing poverty in Newfoundland and Labrador we are making significant progress, I say, Mr. Speaker. The number of people in receipt of Income Support in Newfoundland and Labrador is at an all-time low having been reduced by about 15,000 people since 2003, with about 51,000 receiving Income Support monthly in 2003 compared to about 36,000 in 2013.

In 2003, Mr. Speaker, less than 10 per cent of the population in the Province received Income Support monthly. That compares to less than 7 per cent of the population in 2013.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CORNETT: Low-income cut-off, Mr. Speaker, the most commonly used measure to compare poverty levels in different provinces, show that our Province has gone from having 12.2 per cent of the population living in poverty in 2003 to 5.3 per cent in 2011. That is the most current data available.

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to continuing to build on our successes and carry on the important work of our Poverty Reduction Strategy. Our Poverty Reduction Strategy is a model for others to follow, and is widely regarded by national advocates as a leader in the fight against poverty.

Recognizing the complexity of poverty and the need for a co-ordinated and integrated approach, our Poverty Reduction Strategy is a government-wide strategy. In 2003, Mr. Speaker, Newfoundland and Labrador had one of the highest levels of poverty in the country. Since then we have built on our successes and invested in initiatives to support those who need our help the most. We are making progress; we are making a difference in the lives of the Province's most vulnerable.

According to the most recent available data from Statistics Canada, Newfoundland and Labrador is tied with Saskatchewan as the Province with the second-lowest percentage of people living in low income.

Mr. Speaker, I am personally very proud of our accomplishments and the steps that this government has taken in reducing poverty and improving the lives of individuals and families and communities throughout the beautiful Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Addressing poverty restores the balance of opportunity for all, and it is an essential part of ensuring a truly prosperous Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This has been a paid political announcement brought to you on behalf of the government right now, today – because what I heard is unbelievable, Mr. Speaker. I heard an awful lot about some positive government programming here, but again –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. MURPHY: – all good initiatives, like I said. I did not question the initiatives. Some may need improvement; some need some more strategic investment in them. Mr. Speaker, the motion on the floor of the House says, and I will read you a couple of sections here, “AND WHEREAS in 2012, the Minimum Wage Review Committee recommended an increase in the minimum wage in 2013 to reflect the loss of purchasing power since 2010, and an annual adjustment beginning in 2014 to reflect the Consumer Price Index;” – so we were talking about the Consumer Price Index here.

“AND WHEREAS the Provincial Government instead legislated two 25-cent increases...” – we were talking about an increase to the minimum wage. Now, I thought that was the original intent of the motion and that we would be talking about increasing the higher minimum wage.

We recognize, Mr. Speaker, there are some positive initiatives government is trying out here that reflect towards the Poverty Reduction Strategy. That is fine. That is great, but you brought the wrong speech – they brought the wrong speech. We will probably hear the same speech again when the House reconvenes.

The next day that the House sits we are going to hear all of these announcements of the re-announcements of the announcements again that were in Budget 2013 and the past announcements in Budget 2012. We are going to hear about the same announcements that were made in Budget 2011 and, indeed, some of the announcements that were made as far back as 2003. I dare say the next time they stand up to respond to the Budget they will be standing up and responding up to the Budget in the Peckford years.

We can go on and talk about these initiatives, and that is fine. When government's Private Members' Day comes up, and comes ahead the next time around they can speak to those initiatives and ask for an aye or a nay of the House, but the initiative on the part of this party right now, I say to the hon. members across the floor, had to do with indexing and increasing the minimum wage. Yes, important components about the Poverty Reduction Strategy, great, and we know all about REEP. That is great.

I can tell where the government is going right now with this. They are probably going to end up voting against us on this particular motion, even though we are only talking about something basic, a basic right. A right to a fair and competitive wage is one argument, yes, but the simple fact of indexing that so we can keep the people of the Province who are working on a minimum wage – keep those wages indexed, for example, to the rate of inflation. It is something short, something sweet, and something simple.

We have seen the prices of foods increase to the point where I went down to the grocery store the other and paid an extra \$2 on a bag of apples and the same thing with the price of oranges. It has gone up by \$2 on a bag of apples.

When you are talking about indexing the price of food, for example, when you are on minimum wage that is a huge amount of money, and when you are talking about the price of food going up. How do you meet that on a minimum wage? I can remember when I was starting out in my career working out there back in 1979-1980, my first job, and working at minimum wage then

how unaffordable some things were and the limits to your purchasing. That argument is still there today about having things affordable for people.

Again, we can talk about fuel prices, energy prices, when it comes to indexing. We have energy prices over the last couple of years that are actually gone through the roof. We know that. When I first got my driver's licence I think I was dealing with something like forty-seven cents a litre for gasoline and now it is starting to creep up there to \$1.40 here in the St. John's area again. It is hurtful to see.

If you are person who is working out there for minimum wage and working right now at \$10.25 an hour, the next gasoline increase certainly has gone through eight hours work. For example, when it comes to some of the consumer prices out here, just for the benefit of the Member for Port au Port – and again we are only talking about cost of living. The last time that we actually saw government respond to the cost of living was for the Seniors' Benefit, I believe. They saw 1.2 per cent or 1.7 per cent, I think, the number was. It was not astronomical money, no Sir, not when it came to the Seniors' Benefit.

When it came to the Consumer Price Index numbers right now, for example, for food if you look at 2010 just for food alone we are talking 2 per cent – a 2 per cent increase to food prices. We are talking in 2011, 3.8 per cent; we are talking in 2012, 3.5 per cent ;and it is only in 2013 that it seemed like it slowed down a little, about 1.4 per cent. Again, minimum wage has not kept up to the consumer prices that we are seeing these days.

While we have seen wages stall – and we can almost say that it is affecting everybody. We have seen prices accelerate passed what has been given out by government even. Why shouldn't we? This does not cost government a cent to do. This is something that government, while it addresses whenever it is paying out a cheque to somebody who needs it or the assistance that is needed on the part of anybody, this is something that everybody should be keeping in mind

anyway. This is almost – well, dare I say it, Mr. Speaker – logical. This makes sense. This should make sense to everybody. To the small business owner to the person who owns the mine out there, that if you want to keep happy workers and at the same time have them performing, at least have them living decently too.

Look at the cost of shelter. There is nobody here in the immediate St. John's area who cannot tell me that the price of shelter, rent, housing if you will, has kept up with the minimum wage, or that the minimum wage has kept up with the price of shelter, I should say in this case. We have seen the price of rent skyrocket.

I had one constituent phone me immediately after I was elected whose rent went from \$650 a month to \$1,200. It forced them out of town. It forced them to quit their job and move to a rural area of the Province. That is one person. Her and her family ended up moving as a result. She was a single mom. She could not afford to live in the city. That is one less person who is out there in the workforce and one less person who is available to go through the doors of a trade's college or a university because all of a sudden it has become unaffordable.

Government can talk about the positive initiatives when it comes to student loan relief, that sort of thing – and we believe in that – but how about the cost of living? The cost of living went up for that family overnight. The cost of shelter: 3.1 per cent in 2010, 5.8 per cent in 2011, 3.5 per cent increase in 2012, and 2 per cent in 2013. This is basic why government does not do this.

Energy costs – here we go, you talk about your Muskrat Falls: 6.7 per cent increase in 2010, 13.2 per cent increase in 2011, and 4.6 per cent increase in 2012. The cost of goods: 2.2 per cent, 3.7 per cent, and 1.6 per cent respectively. The price of transportation: 3.7 per cent, 5.5 per cent, and 2.4 per cent respectively.

That is in the 2011 survey. As a matter of fact, that comes from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador Web site, 1980-

2013 numbers. There you go. It is right on the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador Web site. Maybe they should be looking at their own numbered information that is out there.

Mr. Speaker, we have good cause to address this just on the basis of the Consumer Price Index. That Consumer Price Index number too should be at the same time – and the Newfoundland and Labrador government can get these numbers, easily I think, from the Government of Canada Web site, for example. They should also include food and fuel costs, too. It should not be just about core inflation. It should be about everything else that is in there, not just about core inflation as measured by Statistics Canada.

We have the cost of some other items that have gone up in percentile compared, here in Newfoundland and Labrador, to other regions of the country. It is constant over the statistic where you are looking at percentages here, for example, for goods and services that are coming into the Province that have to be afforded by people who are on minimum wage who are keeping the economy going, do not forget, because they are an integral part of the economy. About 20 per cent of the workforce, I think, is working here now on minimum wage, if not very close to it. We should be looking at incentives to grow wages.

While government can come out and say the mean wage right now has gone up in this Province to \$66,000 or \$68,000, that is great, that is fine and dandy. We see that in the burgeoning industries, offshore oil, that sort of thing, but there is still somebody who is going to have to work in that retail store. There is still somebody who is going to have to flip the burger. There is still somebody who is going to have to be working in the corner store, working for that small business and keeping households going in this Province.

That is why we have to look at increases in minimum wage, too. A lot of times these people who are out there working in these industries, by themselves sometimes, are unsupervised. When you are looking at that, certainly Consumer Price Index is a huge part of that.

Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to be able to get up and speak about this because I have been there. I have worked for minimum wage. I have worked there for a long time. I have worked in industries that some would consider low income, the taxi trade where you are working long hours and everything for little money. I have worked downtown over the years.

In particular, any time when I was working retail, and I have about six or seven years working retail for an electronics firm a long time ago, that is where you cut your teeth on what is actually happening. Back then there were no such drug programs or anything like that, like government has today. In some cases, some people are lucky when they are working on low income.

When it comes to child care; I would like to address the whole child care matter that was brought up too. We recognize that government has done something with child care, but we still need all-day daycare for people out there if we are going to keep these people in the workforce, too.

Government administered daycare is probably the only way it is going to be able to be done in this Province and have it run successfully to the point that everybody, including the low-wage earners, is going to be able to take advantage of it. If we want a workforce that is going to be out there working on minimum wage, we have to make sure the essential service is going to be there, and that should be child care.

July, 2010, when the wage increased to \$10 an hour – the last couple of minutes I have – the minister responsible noted this increase is another way that the government is improving the quality of life for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. An increase in the minimum wage helps individuals and families achieve increased self-reliance and contribute to a stronger provincial economy. What better way to contribute to self-reliance of a family than to put more money in their pocket? If government votes against this, we are going to find out how

much money they are going to keep from getting into people's pockets.

Increases to the minimum wage will help young workers and women fifty-five years and over. Without increases in the minimum wage women will be falling seriously behind. The women who are working out there – and you will find the demographic out there, you will find in the minimum wage market that there are more women working out there than there are men out there. Some of them are single parents.

A statistic I saw was that 37 per cent of the women who are out there working for minimum wage, they are mothers. They are trying to keep families going. What happens to family nutrition? At the same time we hear statistics out there about more food bank usage so we think the minimum wage in this Province is actually doing great, that we cannot justify an increase to the minimum wage because some people are saying food bank usage is down.

They are saying the Poverty Reduction Strategy now is down to about 5 per cent of the population, the previous member who was just up. Why is food bank usage up if the number is down to 5 per cent? It was 12 per cent a little while ago but there were not so many people using food banks. Answer the question.

The statistic is there. It is stark and it is staring us all in the face, but we cannot address a wage concern that does not cost government a cent. As a matter of fact, if they increased wages a little bit the possibility is there, for example, that somebody might be contributing a little bit more income tax and they might feel good about themselves if they are becoming a contributor to the Province's coffers, because we are going to need it in the future. We are going to need it in the future, but we need people here working in the economy, too. They deserve to become a fair contributor to the economy at the same time. We need to show fairness.

The last statistic in the last twenty seconds that I have when it comes to rent; Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, God love them, they are out there working so hard for social housing, social

housing programs we recognize. They take about 20 per cent of somebody's wage. Right now for a minimum wage earner, Mr. Speaker, it might be about \$400 a month. The average wage, according to Canada Mortgage and Housing, here in St. John's right now is \$832. I think that speaks volumes. It will be nice to hear what government is going to say about this.

We are going to appreciate, when the time for the vote comes, that government is going to support us on these two basic facts of increasing the minimum wage and increasing to the point where we are going to see indexing.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am very pleased to have a chance to respond to some of the dialogue here today and to have a few words on this particular motion.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, I want to say that from my perspective the motion we are debating is very narrow. We ought to be focused a little more on families and low-income earners in the bigger picture. This particular motion is a very narrow focus on one aspect of what gives these people, these families, a greater quality of life and what provides them more disposable income in their pockets. However, by only focusing on the minimum wage it does not recognize many of the other ways governments of any stripe can assist low-income earners and families who are on low income. For that fundamental reason I cannot support the motion and I will get into more detail in a few moments.

The other piece that is given a strong predominance here in the remarks coming from the New Democratic Party in particular in justifying this motion is that they want to tie minimum wage increases in the Province to the

Consumer Price Index. I do not support that and I am going to tell you why in a few minutes because it is a little bit of a flawed argument. We would not be where we are today if government had taken that approach when we started down the road of increasing minimum wage a number of years ago.

I also sense through much of the dialogue, Mr. Speaker, that there has been no consideration in preparing this motion and preparing for the speaking notes to be used and the rationale to be presented. I have not discovered any consideration being given to the business community because there are two parts to raising the minimum wage. One part is, obviously, you decide to raise the wage by a percentage point or a dollar figure, ten cents or twenty-five cents an hour, whatever the case might be.

The second part to that, of course, is the impact it has on business and the business community. I do not hear or I have not yet, at least, heard much commentary around sensing the challenges for some of the small businesses, particularly in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, some of our seasonal tourism industries, for example, our motels, our bed and breakfasts, and a whole host of other things in some parts of my district in particular. There are other parts of the Province in rural Newfoundland that live and die on the tourism industry. The decisions we take on minimum wage have a significant impact on what they do.

I am going to come back to some of that, Mr. Speaker. I want to talk just for a moment about the role of the committee because there have been a number of questions asked of me in the House of Assembly by the Leader of the Opposition in my capacity as minister of labour responsible for minimum wage. The role of the committee, like any committees that government uses for any number of initiatives, is to do some research and to provide some observations and recommendations. We do it – I will not exaggerate to say every single day, but we do it very regularly. It is not new. The Liberal government before us and the Tory government before that would have done it. We always do

this on occasion. We consult and we look for recommendations.

That is what they are, Mr. Speaker: recommendations. It is then up to a Cabinet and a government to decide whether the recommendations are appropriate for what they want to do, whether the recommendations support the vision they are pursuing, or whether they do not. Sometimes you accept recommendations and sometimes you do not. That is a matter of how things work.

What I find really interesting, though, is the perspective that is being advanced by the New Democratic Party in very forcefully arguing that the recommendations of this committee ought to have been accepted primarily because the committee recommended it. Yet, Mr. Speaker, I remember multiple – and multiple is an understatement – reports with recommendations placed before this House of Assembly by numerous ministers over the last two years on Muskrat Falls, and all of them recommending moving forward with the project and recommending the kinds of things we are doing today. Unequivocally, the members of the New Democratic Party stand in their place and they say without reservation: We do not believe the reports, we do not believe the recommendations are strong, and government should not be following the recommendations on Muskrat Falls.

Mr. Speaker, that is a very interesting take. What they also advocated during that discussion was you ought to bring in and engage the Public Utilities Board because that is a group that could look at providing better recommendations. I think from my perspective they would be sensing the Public Utilities Board may recommend what they would like recommended and that is why they advocated for it.

Let me finish my train of thought, Mr. Speaker. I think it is important, when you advocate following recommendations, to establish the credibility of where people are coming from. Two days ago in this House of Assembly one of the members for the NDP introduced – and I was not even aware of it myself – that there is

consideration before the Public Utilities Board that fares for taxis, I believe – I am not sure – be increased. The Public Utilities Board is doing a piece of work and they are going to make recommendations.

Hansard will show, Mr. Speaker – I do not have it here and I did not have time to get it, but I can if I need to – that the member stood in his place and took a completely opposite view to the Public Utilities Board and called upon the Minister of Service Newfoundland and Labrador and me to throw out the Public Utilities Board. You should not be listening to their recommendations; government should step in and make their own decision because it is the right thing to do for the people.

Let me just make sure we have this clear now as we are going through. We started with recommendations on Muskrat Falls by independent reports. Because the recommendations did not support where the NDP wanted to go, we ought not follow the recommendations. We ought to follow the Public Utilities Board because the Public Utilities Board, they suspected, would be against government. Then we get into the discussion on taxi fares and because they feel the Public Utilities Board will not support where they want to be, they say throw the Public Utilities Board out and government make the decision.

Today, as we have done in days before, we are talking about the recommendations of the minimum wage committee. Today, because they do not like the direction that government has taken, they are critical and saying you should have followed the recommendations of the report. This is absolutely critical, Mr. Speaker, because anybody listening to this debate at home has to be able to recognize credibility. This speaks absolutely to the credibility of the argument being brought forth when they only like recommendations when they support the policy of their party.

Unfortunately for them, government does not rate like that. On this side of the House, we are in leadership positions, we have to take stands, and we have to make decisions. Sometimes we

accept recommendations, sometimes we do not, but we never argue on policy that one is better than the other, as the members of the New Democratic Party are doing and have done.

Mr. Speaker, relative to the minimum wage, as I said a few moments ago, I do not support the motion, not because I do not support putting more money into the pockets of low-income earners and low-income families, but because of the approach. Government's approach is absolutely focussed on a more broad perspective of putting money back into the hands of people. We have taken a different approach because we do not believe that minimum wage is the only way to do it.

We believe, for example, in a number of initiatives that my colleagues have talked about: investments in health care, like the Prescription Drug Program, the Adult Dental Program, the home modifications, the Age-Friendly initiatives, and every single one of those initiatives. I could go on, Mr. Speaker. In education we eliminated school fees, money back in people's pockets. We provide free textbooks, money back in people's pockets. We have increased the Residential Energy Efficiency Program, money back in people's pockets.

The goal of this discussion, as I see it, has to be finding ways that we can help families and low-income earners be better off in society. To say minimum wage is the only way to make that happen, I believe, Mr. Speaker, is a very narrow view. That is why I do not support this particular motion and that is why I do support some of the things our government has tried to do around putting money back in people's pockets, and we have continued to do that.

Mr. Speaker, what is also interesting is the Member for St. John's East, who I am referring to relative to credibility, also said a few moments ago, and Hansard will show it, he made that comment that we have to find incentives and we have to – quote - put more money back in the pockets of families.

As I said, the Supportive Living Program, the homeless program, the Home Modification Program, the elimination of student loans, which directly affects low income earners and families, and providing free grant money.

I had a parent call me a couple of days ago from the community of Lawn whose child will now come to university and not have to repay any of the money they would have had to repay through the loan program. That, Mr. Speaker, is putting money back in the pockets of people, which is what the member is advocating for. It is all a matter of perspective, I say, and all a matter of where you sit.

On this side of the House, our view is not as narrow as to say the only way to put money back in people's pockets is minimum wage. There are many other ways and many other things we can do. I have touched on a number of those: the Home Heating Rebate and the elimination of the 8 per cent tax on home heating fuel and electricity, I say to the Member for St. John's East. All of those things put money back into people's pockets, which is the objective.

MR. MURPHY: We pushed for it.

MR. KING: I am glad. If you pushed for it, I am glad because it means you support the policies of government. We are the ones who make the decisions. We do not just push. When we believe in it, we make the decisions and we implement it. I am glad to hear you are supporting that.

Mr. Speaker, here is where we are with the minimum wage today. As of October 2014, we will be at \$10.25 an hour and as of October 2015, we will be at \$10.50. That \$10.50 represents, over the last ten years, a 75 per cent increase in the minimum wage in this Province. I think by anyone's standards a 75 per cent increase represents a very significant shift. Currently, as we speak here today, as well, the \$10.50 we have implemented for 2015, there is no other province at that level right now. That would be the highest minimum wage in all of Canada.

I can read you the minimum wage if you want, but let me touch on one other point before my time expires. The members for the New Democratic Party have been advocating tying the minimum wage to the Consumer Price Index. There are pros and cons to that, Mr. Speaker, and that is why we decided not to do it. We saw there were some possibilities there where minimum wage was not going to get where it needed to be over time and not going to increase.

Let me share with you, if we had linked the minimum wage to the Consumer Price Index when this discussion started several years ago, when government first started increasing the minimum wage, if we had followed the policy of the New Democratic Party here is what the minimum wage would have been today – any idea? It would be \$7.50. That is what the New Democratic Party are advocating, link it to the Consumer Price Index and if we had done that and followed their policy, it would be at \$7.50. Today, Mr. Speaker, our government has adopted two increases that put the minimum wage in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador at \$10.50, a 75 per cent increase since we first started increasing the minimum wage.

Mr. Speaker, I am unfortunately not able to support the motion that is before the House because I believe it is a very narrow view of how we are going to be able to best support people in Newfoundland and Labrador, how we can support low-income families and low-income earners. I just do not believe that this motion is broad enough in perspective. I think we have to take a more holistic view. We need to look at all of the challenges that families face in Newfoundland and Labrador, and single parents and single individuals, I might add, who are low-income earners. We have to look at it in a broader perspective. What financial challenges do they have?

We have done that and we continue to do that. That is why, as I said a few moments ago, we focused on knocking down costs that are occurring to everybody, things like drugs, the Prescription Drug Program, for example, as I said a few moments ago. Each one of those very

important items that this government has adopted over the last number of years has resulted in putting money back in the pockets of low-income families, in the pockets of low-income earners, and in the pockets of seniors, Mr. Speaker. From my perspective, as long as I sit here, that is the focus that I would take.

I do not support a very narrow, very restricted motion that focuses only on the minimum wage as the be-all and end-all. I believe you have to have a broader perspective where you put more than \$3.50 increase in the pockets of people, which we have done. If we had followed the NDP policy, it would have been \$7.50 that people today would be making in seasonal industries. Fortunately, for us, we had more vision than that and we are now up to \$10.50, which is the highest in Canada as of today.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: If the hon. Member for Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi speaks now, she will close the debate.

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

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

I am very happy to stand today and speak once again to the resolution that I brought to the House, seconded by the Member for St. John's East. I want to thank the members in the House who did stand today and take the time to think about the resolution and speak to it: the Members for Terra Nova, St. John's North, Port au Port, St. John's East, and Grand Bank. I appreciate their speaking. I did not agree with everything that has been said, but it is good that we all take part in the discussion and put our thoughts forward.

I want to respond to some of the things that I heard, Mr. Speaker. It was very interesting listening to the members from the government side of the House, because the members from

the government side of the House waxed eloquently on programs that we have in this Province, some of which came in under this government, and these are wonderful programs, but what they talked about had nothing to do with the resolution that was on the floor of the House.

One of the things that this government has been doing consistently through their poverty reduction program, which seems to be in limbo right now, is they have continually put out programs that are excellent programs, such as the drug card program, such as the dental program, rent subsidization and they have put them out as Poverty Reduction Strategy programs and they do not reduce poverty. That is the issue. They do not reduce poverty. They help people who are living in poverty; they do things to help them, but they do not reduce poverty. So I want to take a couple of those programs, I will not take them all. Let's take the dental program, for example. No, I am sorry; I want to talk to the drug program first, the Prescription Drug Program. Let's look at that program.

If we did not have a Prescription Drug Program for people who are on low income, Mr. Speaker, people would not be buying the drugs because they would not be able to afford to buy them. It is not that because there is a drug program that people have more money in their pockets. The issue is if there was not a drug program, they would not be able to buy drugs. That is the bottom line. Just like seniors who do not qualify for the drug program cannot buy drugs. Every second month they may get their prescription filled, but many of them who do not qualify for the drug cannot afford to buy the drug so they do not. The same way for somebody who is on low income, whether it is somebody who is on Income Support or working for minimum wage, if they do not have a drug card they do not buy drugs. That is the problem.

The same way with the dental program, a couple of the members from the government side of the House spoke about the dental program for children. It is the same way, Mr. Speaker. We can all remember and we know the history in

this Province, that there were times in this Province when children were going around with rotten teeth. Even now, for people on Income Support the answer for them sometimes in dental care is they have to have their teeth removed, not have their teeth taken care of with good dental care and preventative care.

If we did not have a dental program, people on minimum wage would not be getting any dental care. When we talk about minimum wage and the need to have a minimum wage that is well above, I would say, the income cut-off point, then our point is the way you deal with poverty is by putting more money in the pockets of people. One of the ways in which you do that is to pay people a fairer salary for the work they do.

If we were to have minimum wage go up, Mr. Speaker, we would not have people who are going around trying to keep two jobs on the go in order to keep their families taken care of. That would not be happening. That is what we are dealing with at this moment.

We had some comments from the Member for Grand Bank referring to the business community. Mr. Speaker, I spoke to the issue of the business community. One of the things I talked about was the fact that incentives can be put in place to help the business community as the minimum wage goes up. For example, continuing to move the business tax for small business down to the point of zero. That would help them be able to deal with paying a better salary to their workers.

We had statistics being thrown around from the other side, Mr. Speaker. One of the statistics I want to put out has to do with the whole fact of minimum wage earners and small business. Increases to the minimum wage have not reduced numbers employed in low paid sectors in this Province.

Employment in sales and service occupations – hospitality, retail, home care – which are areas where we will find people working for minimum wage, employment in those areas grew by 10.2 per cent from the year 2000 to 2011, during

which period in time there were raises to the minimum wage. We did not lose jobs in the low paying sectors; we increased jobs in the low paying sectors. They went from 50,900 up to 56,100 – so from 51,000 up to 56,000 jobs. The employment grew in the sectors where the minimum wage went up.

Mr. Speaker, the points that the government people are making are not based in evidence. They are not dealing with the realities. The evidence of the committee – we had the Member for Grand Bank talk about the NDP policy. What we are putting forward is a resolution based on the recommendations of the expert committee that they put in place to study the minimum wage. If it was a policy – it is not a policy, we put a resolution on the floor – but if it were, it is not a bad policy.

I challenge them, when they put committees in place, to realize there is study that has been done, there is research that is done, they have facts that this committee dealt with in order to make the recommendations that it makes. They just pooh-pooh it. We make a political decision, and I do not even understand the politics of their decision. Who is it that is there telling them not to do it? Who is it that is there pushing them to say, do not do this? That is the issue. That is the issue we have to think about. Who is lobbying them to not do this?

It is not costing the government any money for us to take a policy that raises the minimum wage. Who are they listening to? They are not listening to the people who are going to food banks while they also are working for their families. They are not listening to the people who cannot keep their homes adequately heated.

Another program they talked about is a program that is not even relevant, they talk about the REEP. Well, the majority of people on minimum wage and low income do not even own their own homes. They are renters. They do not even own their own homes. So, they are not even making sense with some of the examples they use.

Mr. Speaker, the only thing to say to this is do the right thing. The only thing to say is, how can we continue in this country to have policies in place where the rich are getting richer, and the poor are getting poorer? The gap between the rich and the poor, both in this country and in this Province, is widening. How can we in conscience sit in this House of Assembly and let that continue? How can we in conscience accept the fact that people in our top 10 per cent continue to earn more and more while people who are in the bottom are static in the position they are in?

Mr. Speaker, I do not think there is any more to say. I think we have made the points that need to be made. I really do ask this House to say we do care about low-income people in this Province, we do care about people who –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER (Wiseman): Order, please!

MS MICHAEL: – really have a very difficult time making ends meet, and we do care about the children in this Province by making sure their parents are earning enough money to help them eat better so they can be healthier, to be clothed better, and to be taken care of.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I will take my place and wait for the vote on this resolution.

MR. SPEAKER: The debate now concludes. You have all heard the question.

All those in favour of the motion, ‘aye’.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

MR. SPEAKER: All those against, ‘nay’.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Nay.

AN HON. MEMBER: Division.

MR. SPEAKER: Division has been called.

Summon the members.

Division

MR. SPEAKER: Are the Whips ready?

AN HON. MEMBER: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: All those in favour of the motion, please rise.

CLERK: Ms Michael, Mr. Murphy, Ms Rogers.

MR. SPEAKER: All those against the motion, please rise.

CLERK: Mr. King, Ms Shea, Mr. O'Brien, Mr. Davis, Mr. McGrath, Mr. Crummell, Ms Johnson, Mr. Jackman, Mr. Hutchings, Mr. Verge, Mr. Littlejohn, Mr. Hedderson, Mr. Dalley, Mr. French, Ms Perry, Mr. Kevin Parsons, Mr. Cross, Mr. Pollard, Mr. Brazil, Mr. Sandy Collins, Mr. Cornect, Mr. Peach, Mr. Hunter, Mr. Dinn, Mr. Andrew Parsons, Mr. Joyce, Ms Dempster, Mr. Bennett, Mr. Lane, Mr. Kirby, Mr. Slade, Mr. Mitchelmore.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

CLERK: Mr. Speaker, the ayes three, the nays thirty-two.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The motion is defeated.

This being Private Members' Day, this House now stands adjourned. I understand from the Government House Leader that we are closing for the traditional Easter recess and will be back on May 5.

Enjoy your Easter break, everyone, and we will see you on May 5.