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Speaker: Honourable Ross Wiseman, MHA

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The House met at 1:30 p.m.

MR. SPEAKER (Wiseman): Order, please!

Admit strangers.

Before we start today's proceedings, I want to acknowledge a large group of very special guests in our gallery. We have with us today, fifty members of the Paradise 50 Plus Adventure group. They are under the capable leadership of their President Maxine Earles.

Welcome to our galleries.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

Statements by Members

MR. SPEAKER: Today we will have members' statements from the Member for the District of Baie Verte – Springdale; the Member for District of Port au Port; the Member for the District of Bonavista North; the Member for District of Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair; the Member for District of Kilbride; and the Member for the District of St. John's North.

The hon. the Member for Baie Verte – Springdale.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. POLLARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

A hard-working businessman of Springdale has added his name to an elite list of safety conscious professionals.

I rise in this hon. House today to congratulate the CEO of Newfoundland and Labrador Vegetation Control, Terry Croucher, upon his induction into the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Commission's Safety Charter as its fifty-eighth member. The honour is reserved for the Province's top business promoters of safety in the workplace.

Introduced in 2007 and administered by the Workplace Health, Safety and Compensation Commission, the Safety Charter is to support the continuous improvement of healthy and safe work places throughout the Province.

NLVC's commitment to safety began around fourteen years ago when Terry started to focus on safety issues by promoting it in his company. The driving force behind Terry's commitment is evident in the following quote, "At the end of the day, I want everyone to go home okay".

Croucher was inducted into the Safety Charter at a ceremony in Springdale on Wednesday, March 24, where he was joined by community members, WHSCC representatives, and a large number of his employees.

I invite all hon. members to join me in applauding Terry and his company for their leadership in safety promotion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. CORNETT: Mr. Speaker, I rise today in this hon. House to recognize the Rotary Club of Stephenville for their determination to revive the Rotary Music Festival after a one year break.

Under the leadership of Rosa Dollard, Debbie Brake-Patten and Noreen Dwyer, a steering committee was formed to ensure that a very successful festival was presented to showcase the diverse cultural fabric of the area.

Although opportunity for youth in the community was the main purpose of the Festival, categories for the 2014 Rotary Music Festival were broadened this year to include musical demonstrations from the Bay St. George Folk Arts Council.

Mr. Speaker, the winners of this year's Rotary Music Festival were Stephen Eckert of Kippens, Rose Bowl winner and best in senior piano; Stephenville Elementary Grade 5 Choir, best Choral; Claire St. Croix, best instrumental; Stephenville Middle School, best band; St. Michael's School, best choral speech; Emma Dunphy, best junior piano; and Emma Buckner, best junior vocal.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. members in this hon. House to join with me in congratulating the

Stephenville Rotary Club Music Festival committee, the volunteers, and all the participants for their dedication and hard work in this year's festival.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista North.

MR. CROSS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It challenges my cognitive ability today, Mr. Speaker, to stand and select words appropriate to describe an event which happened a few short days ago.

On May 3, dozens of senior high students converged on the MUN Medicine's Neuroscience Department to compete for the honour of representing Newfoundland and Labrador at the Canadian Institute of Health Research's Brain Bee event at McMaster University.

The competition is a showcase of young neuroscientists demonstrating their brain power about the human brain.

Pearson Academy's eleventh grade student Jane Cooze of New-Wes-Valley was declared the provincial champion and she will represent our Province on May 31 at Hamilton, Ontario. She eagerly awaits the challenge. Paraphrasing her words – "it's fascinating to study how the brain connects and interprets electrical impulses that allow us to decode colour, movement and emotion among all of the other stimuli it receives."

Memorial University's goal is to increase the number of skilled and passionate students who want to study neuroscience, and possibly make a career in research and development.

All hon. members, I ask that we rack our brains together in unison to send best wishes for a successful Brain Storm Activity to Jane Cooze.

Your old principal, Jane, is among your biggest fans!

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, I rise in this hon. House to recognize two very important organizations in my District of Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair – Labrador South Home Care serving the communities of L'Anse au Clair to Red Bay and Loving Hands Home Care, formally Northern Home Care Services, serving the communities north of Red Bay to Cartwright.

This year, Labrador South Home Care is celebrating thirty years of service while the Harbourview Manor, a seniors' home in Mary's Harbour, is in its tenth year of operation.

Recognizing the need for seniors' care, Labrador South Home Care was formed under a volunteer board of directors, employing one co-ordinator and two employees. Today, the organization employs more than twenty people, some of whom have been with them since its inception.

The home care program was once solely funded with government grants, but today in collaboration with government and client paid funds, the program continues to grow. However, the success of this program would not be possible without the dedicated volunteers and staff who go beyond their call of duty to accommodate their clients.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. members to join me in recognizing all home care workers across our entire Province who provide a valuable service every day for our seniors.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DINN: Mr. Speaker, on March 8, the Harness Horse Owners Association held its dinner, dance, and awards presentation at St. John's Racing and Entertainment Centre. Approximately 100 people attended this ceremony.

After a fine meal, twenty-two awards were presented, many dedicated to the memory of people who were instrumental in building and keeping alive the harness racing industry in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The top award winners were Shane Forward and Terry Williams with three awards each. Shane was the driver of the year, the driver with the most money, and the top driver in the forty-plus starts category. Terry was the top trainer, the most improved driver, and the top driver with twenty to thirty-nine starts.

The most gentlemanly driver was Wayne Williams. Sheila Ivimey won the Dave MacRoberts Memorial Award for long-standing dedication to harness racing. Scott Forward was honoured as the trainer with the most wins and Aubrey Williams was the top driver in the ten to nineteen start category.

Eight awards were presented to the horses. The Horse of the Year Award went to Muggy's English Baby. The horse with the fastest time was Inspired Art with a time of two minutes and one second.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all hon. members to join me in congratulating all the award winners.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Mr. Speaker, today I would like to recognize the hard work and dedication of all the volunteers who have committed their time to organizing the Prince of Wales Collegiate Safe Grad this year.

On June 26 – the last day of school – no less than 219 Level III students in the class of 2014 will take part in this year's Safe Grad

celebration. The committee assures me that this will be a fabulous and unforgettable event for all the students and their guests; however, in keeping with PWC's tradition, the exact details of the event will remain secret until school closes next month.

This year, the PWC Safe Grad committee has managed to raise close to \$12,000 so far. Members will no doubt recognize that this work takes a lot of organization and volunteer commitment. Several dozen parents and committee members have helped with the organizing this year. Carol O'Keefe is co-ordinating the event, along with the fundraising efforts; with Sandi Miller chairing the decorating committee; Mary Pumphrey heading up the entertainment; and Georgina Downton leading the planning for food and refreshments.

I ask all hon. members to join me in recognizing the hard work of all of the Prince of Wales Collegiate Safe Grad committee volunteers.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Statements by Ministers.

Statements by Ministers

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Public Engagement.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. KENT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today in this hon. House to recognize a local volunteer who was honoured last month in Ottawa and presented with the Governor General's Caring Canadian Award, given to Canadians who selflessly dedicate their time and energy to others.

As a student at Memorial University, Sophie Harrington became a driving force with Enactus, a volunteer non-profit, international organization which mobilizes university students to develop outreach projects that improve the quality of life and standard of living for people in need.

Through Enactus, universities and colleges around the world compete in regional and national competitions for the chance to demonstrate the impact of their community projects at the world championship each year. During her time at Enactus, Sophie managed a team of seventy-three volunteers and twenty-three projects, including Launch Pad, Canada's first student-run entrepreneurial incubation centre, and Think Green, an initiative to help elementary school students run their own recycling businesses.

Now, as an alumna of the program, she continues to mentor the Memorial University team and sits on their Business Advisory Board, and also Chairs their Alumni Advisory Board. She continues to give back to the national organization as their volunteer photographer and designer, and was Enactus Canada's Alumna of the Year.

Sophie also serves on the volunteer board for Lakecrest Independent School, has volunteered with TEDxSt. Johns, and sits on the executive of Mile Zero Ultimate, St. John's Ultimate Frisbee League, where she helped to grow its membership and assist it in developing a number of initiatives to make ultimate frisbee safer and more accessible.

Mr. Speaker, recognizing the importance youth play in helping to shape the future of Newfoundland and Labrador, *Budget 2014: Shared Prosperity, Fair Society, Balanced Outlook* provides approximately \$640,000 in funding to more than thirty organizations that support youth engagement activities and learning opportunities for young people, and an additional \$2.5 million has been allocated for thirty-four Community Youth Networks across the Province.

These investments include our annual URock Volunteer Awards, which honour youth and youth-led organizations. The 2014 awards are taking place two days from now at the Glacier in the great City of Mount Pearl – I added that part.

Mr. Speaker, by celebrating the achievements of Newfoundland and Labrador's young people, we are inspiring all residents to contribute to the future growth and development of their communities.

I invite all members to join me in congratulating Sophie Harrington for receiving the Governor General's Caring Canadian Award, and for her dedication to giving back to her community. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. We all have an entrepreneurial spirit. We have that ability to inspire others to act so we can build in ourselves, in our families, and in our communities a healthier, more prosperous, and stronger world.

I want to, on behalf of the Official Opposition, extend big congratulations to Sophie Harrington on being a recipient of the Governor General's Caring Canadian Award. Sophie currently works at m5 and is developing and engaging campaigns Province-wide, is very well educated with two degrees, has top individual student award for academic leadership and commitment in the Faculty of Business, highest marks in the graduating class for the Bachelor of Arts and Political Science, and ranked on the dean's list from 2002 to 2007. She is so very well rounded that her photography has been featured in *The Globe and Mail*.

This type of passion and these types of ideas and talents illustrate what youth are capable of at home, abroad, in a team, or on their own. The best way for our youth to succeed is to look at the real-world challenges that exist, how others can gain financial security, how we can equip the unemployed to find the skills to reach meaningful employment, help aspiring entrepreneurs, and bring economic development like Enactus does to struggling neighbourhoods.

We need to look at developing team work, leadership, and communication skills, and that only comes from real-life experience. Government should consider the cuts it made to its abandoned Youth Retention and Attraction Strategy, but it should also look at leaders like

Sophie if government plans to re-establish the Youth Advisory Committee to join that.

Thank you.

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 today. How proud we all are as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, to know that Sophie Harrington was this year's recipient of the Caring Canadians Award on the part of the Governor General.

We have a lot of youth in this Province, Mr. Speaker, who are out there who are shining examples, just like Sophie. One example, just to bring up here in the House, I was down to the St. John's City Council's ceremonies last week for the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Youth and with all of the youth that were there who were eligible for this award, they could only pick one. There were a number of shining examples from the immediate St. John's area who stood out, but there was only one winner at that particular time.

I would say that we have another Caring Canadian Award that is going to be coming up, a future winner – I will bring this to the attention of the government – in the form of a young gentleman by the name of Darcy Taylor who also has an extensive resume, like that of Sophie Harrington.

Again, congratulations, on the part of our party, to Sophie. We wish her all the best in her future endeavours, as well as to the future winners. Congratulations as well to government. Keep putting that money towards youth. We need it.

Thank you.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DALLEY: Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to talk briefly about Newfoundland and Labrador's official forest fire season. The season began May 1 on the Island, and begins May 15 in Labrador. It extends into late September.

The Newfoundland and Labrador forest industry employs 5,500 people through direct and indirect employment and is valued at \$250 million annually. For economic, social and cultural reasons, this tremendous resource must be protected.

The fire suppression team within the Department of Natural Resources protects our natural resources, our communities, our homes, and our residents from wildfires. In 2013, the fire suppression team responded to 101 fires throughout the Province, the majority of which could have been prevented.

During the forest fire season, a permit to burn is required, at no cost, for lighting outdoor fires for the purpose of clearing land and burning brush within 300 metres of a forest.

At this time of the year, fine fuels such as dead vegetation in fields and other open areas appear wet; however, they can dry and burn in a matter of hours when conditions are right. Fine fuels play a role in most of the fires responded to each year because they ignite easily and can spread fire quickly.

Newfoundlanders and Labradorians use our forests for hiking, camping, and other activity. With this privilege comes the responsibility to take care of our forest resource. The official start of forest fire season is an appropriate time to remind residents to be careful when they are in the woods.

Permits to burn and copies of the forest fire regulations can be obtained at regional or district forest management offices throughout the Province. The lighting of fires for cooking and camping do not require a permit, but certain forest fire regulations must be followed.

Mr. Speaker, our firefighters, incident management team, air services pilots and

maintenance crews and other staff members are to be commended for their tremendous efforts. I am confident in their ability to protect our forests, our property and our people. We can help by being careful.
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, this is certainly a timely statement. We are getting into the time of year now where people are getting out and about in the woods, whether it is camping, whether it is hiking, fishing, hunting and so on. It is certainly important for people to be mindful when we are out enjoying our great outdoors, that we are mindful of our environment; not only do we make sure we leave it the way we found it in terms of litter and so on, but also, Mr. Speaker, that we be mindful of any campfires and so on that we may have in the woods while we are enjoying it, so as to not destroy such a great resource that we are so lucky to have here in this Province.

Mr. Speaker, I noted in the minister's statement he talked about permits that you can pick up at the District Forest Management Offices. I am not sure if these permits are available online or not. If they are not, I certainly would encourage the government to look at putting them online.

Another point, Mr. Speaker, I noticed the minister in his statement never mentioned the toll-free number that is out there. So I am going to throw it out there. There is a toll-free number to report forest fires 1-866-709-Fire, 3473.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

I, too, thank the minister for the advance copy of his statement.

I would like to recognize the firefighters, pilots, maintenance crews and the incident management team for the work they do and the way they do it. These are important tasks carrying great responsibility and potential danger.

While I appreciate the minister saying he has confidence in the firefighting services in our Province, I think there is more that government should be doing to help prevent these fires. I suggest that the minister look at beefing up public education regarding what to do to prevent forest fires since the minister notes that most of the fires last year could have been prevented.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Oral Questions.

Oral Questions

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government cancelled the contract with Humber Valley Paving on March 21. This means the window for a subcontractor to claim under the mechanics' lien was April 20. Meanwhile, this story did not break in the media until April 28.

I ask the Premier: Since the window on the mechanics' lien is closed, what process can subcontractors use now to get the money they are owed by Humber Valley Paving?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER MARSHALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, everyone involved in the construction business, subcontractors, suppliers of labour and materials, all know that when they perform their work on a contract or on a subcontract, a lien comes into existence. The lien continues while they are doing the work. Then when they stop doing their work, the lien

continues for another thirty days. They do not have to do anything to get the lien, other than perform the work or provide the material. Then they have to file a mechanics' lien and that it keeps it going for a longer period of time. Then they have to start an action in the court, which keeps it going indefinitely until it is resolved by the court.

Anyone who provides labour or materials would know that it is thirty days after they provide the materials they have to file a mechanics' lien. They know that, and they would take the appropriate steps to protect their interest.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am sure the Premier knows that usually in these situations when there is work ongoing – let's not forget that this company asked for an extension and was granted an extension on this contract which would have ended July of 2014. Since the contract was cancelled, this left many of the subcontractors, many small businesses that were expected to continue doing work.

I ask the Premier: Since the window is now closed on the mechanics' lien period, how are those subcontractors going to access the money that you have held back from this contract?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, as I said, anybody doing work on the project would know that they have a time limit in which to file a mechanics' lien. If they do not file their lien, they do not have priority. Therefore, what they would have to do, if there is money owed to them they would start an action in the Supreme Court and sue for the money that is owed to them.

Every payment that the government made under the contract, the government held back 10 per cent in Canada's lien holdback, and the minister indicated the other day there is about \$1.2

million in a mechanics' lien holdback fund that is available for disbursement.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Not only did the subcontractor not know that this contract was cancelled, but the Premier did not know that this contract was cancelled. What I am referring to, many of those small contractors were expecting to go back to work because this contract was extended to July of this year. By cancelling the contract, you closed that window. On top of that, you did not get a sworn statutory declaration from the company saying that everyone was paid.

I ask the Premier: What process can those small contractors use now to get access to the holdback?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Premier.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

PREMIER MARSHALL: Mr. Speaker, again, yes, I did not know until – I think it was April 26 when I was informed in Halifax Airport.

Mr. Speaker, if I had been involved in providing labour and material to that project, I would know, as every contractor knows and everybody involved in that business knows, they have a time limit in which they want to file the lien. They watch that very closely. If they are not paid thirty days after they provide their last work and materials, then they file a mechanics' lien and keep it going. They would take whatever action they have to take, that they would consider appropriate to protect their interests.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Under normal circumstances, if a government is going to cancel a contract which is midstream, keep in mind, those contractors expected until July of 2014 for this to happen.

Why did you not get a sworn statutory declaration to protect the subcontractors?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I explained that last week in the House during Question Period. The company itself would apply to have the mechanics' lien holdback released. Before we will release the mechanics' lien holdback, we would then ask them to supply us with a statutory declaration.

We do not apply for the declaration, they do. We would not ask for that until they asked to have the mechanics' lien holdback released. The company has not done that, so therefore we would not ask for the statutory declaration until they do ask for that.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Given the uncertainty around the payment for those subcontractors, why wouldn't the minister ask for that sworn statutory declaration today so we can protect those subcontractors?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, again, we have the mechanics' lien in place. We will continue to have that lien holdback until they request that we release that. Once they request a release of the holdback, then we will demand to have the statutory declaration before we release the mechanics' lien holdback. The \$1.18 million will not be released until we get that statutory declaration.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The minister has repeatedly referred to the legal staff of legal advisors on this issue. He keeps talking about that.

I ask the minister: What legal staff did you use? Was it at your Department of Transportation and Works, or was it the legal staff at the Department of Justice?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in the Department of Transportation and Works we have one of the best legal advisors in the government. We have him there; we deal with him on a day-to-day basis, as I said last week.

We deal with contracts every day. That is what the Department of Transportation and Works is all about, dealing with contracts. We have a legal advisor on our own staff who also gets legal advice from the Department of Justice. We have a full complement of legal advisors.

Mr. Speaker, I have to clarify something. The Member for St. John's South brought up different contracts, talking about contracts, and we deal with different contracts every day. Two contracts he brought up – and I will get up on the next question and answer that.

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.

I am just looking for some clarification on this issue around a legal opinion.

I ask the minister: Was the Department of Justice involved in the legal opinion on this specific contract?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, we have our own legal advisor within the department who deals with us on a day-to-day basis and who also deals with the Department of Justice on many of our contracts. A lot of the contracts, if our legal advisor feels he needs more legal advice, yes, he does go and get it.

As I was going to say, the Member for St. John's South brought up two contracts. I do not feel the House of Assembly –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. MCGRATH: I do not feel the House of Assembly is the right place to be talking about individual contracts, but I have to clarify something that was said yesterday by the Member for St. John's South. He brought up a contract about brush cutting. He compared that contract to the one we have been dealing with all week. I want to clarify to the general public –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

MR. BALL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I ask the minister, just to be very simple. It is a yes or no answer. Was the Minister of Justice involved in this specific contract with Humber Valley Paving on the Trans-Labrador Highway?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Yes.

As I was saying, the Member for St. John's South brought up –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. MCGRATH: – a contract on brush cutting and he compared it to the contract we have been talking about now for over a week. I want to clarify for the people who are here today and for the people in our listening audience that the contractor with that brush cutting contract – we did not cancel that contract. That contractor came into us. He terminated his contract. Not only that, Mr. Speaker, but once he terminated his contract we also found out they had falsified documents that were necessary to get the contract, thus the penalty of twelve months.

The other contract that was cancelled was cancelled by the bonding agency.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Virginia Waters.

MS C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance said at Budget time that her government has a record they are very proud of and that they had a plan for strong fiscal management.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS C. BENNETT: You have to question these statements knowing that last year this government spent \$84 million in consulting fees, \$3 million more than they planned to spend on the provincial roads program this year.

I ask the minister: Why are you spending so much money on external consultants?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, I did say at Budget time that we do have a sound track record when it comes to fiscal management. We are very proud of our record. We are very proud of the investments that we have made into education, into health care, into Child, Youth and Family Services, and certainly into roads.

Oftentimes, we do have expertise that we use within government, very valuable expertise, we value our public service, we do not question where lawyers come from or not come from, which department; but there are times when you do go for outside expertise, which is also very valuable as well.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, \$84 million is a significant amount of money. That is more than the government spent on environment, fisheries, IBRD, tourism, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, and on roads in this fiscal year.

I ask the minister: What controls are in place to measure the return on the money you are spending on external consultants?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we have a very dedicated public service that evaluates every single dollar that is spent in government. We have a Treasury Board; we have Cabinet. We make sure that every dollar is spent very wisely.

She seems to have an issue with the money we are spending with external consultants. Perhaps she could identify which specific area she would not have spent that money and would not have

invested in the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS C. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, this government has talked about competencies within the public service time and time again, and I would totally agree that we have many talented people working in the public sector. Even yesterday the Minister of Transportation talked about the great work they do –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS C. BENNETT: I ask the minister: Why are you paying so much money to external consultants instead of relying on your own internal experts?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There are oftentimes when a need comes up for an external consultant; in fact, one I can think of most recently is where we hired a consultant to look at a review of how to spend money better in government. That \$3 million contract brought \$20 million in savings to the Treasury, Mr. Speaker. Is she suggesting that we not do that and not find ways to save money?

Again, I ask the member to table, to specify, which particular contract she would not have done to improve services and to improve everyday life for the people of the Province, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I say to the minister, save the \$500,000 on the radiation, because the minister already announced we need two machines in Corner Brook now, as I have been saying for years.

Mr. Speaker, officials from Transportation and Works contacted the Official Opposition office prior to Budget 2014 requesting the top three priorities for a transportation capital works project in each Liberal district.

I ask the minister: Can you provide an update on the status of these requests?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, during the Budget process every year, we do suggest that MHAs give us their top priorities to roadwork that they feel is the top priorities in their districts. We get that from all forty-eight, and then the officials within the department will sit down and they put them all together. We look through them to prioritize them from there, and then we will send out notices to all of the MHAs as to what work will be done within this year.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, the minister has touted his efforts about getting tenders out early for capital projects, but we have yet to see any announcements for districts on this side of the House.

I ask the minister: When can we expect to see announcements of work in Liberal districts, or does the early tendering process only apply to PC districts in this Province?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I empathize with the member across the way. Obviously, he only listens to the news that he wants to hear. On March 28, I announced that a tender would be called for road improvement initiatives throughout Western Newfoundland; some include areas represented by the member opposite.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. MCGRATH: There is no basis for the Opposition's claim here whatsoever.

Some of the ones, just to go down through them, repairs to sections of Ring Road in Corner Brook – district across the way. Route 430, Deer Lake to Cormack – I believe that is in a district across the way – you are welcome. Route 440, at Hughes Brook Hill and Pond Road from Rocky Harbour to Norris Point, you are welcome. Repairs also included for Route 420 –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: Mr. Speaker, announcements are not tenders. They announced the hospital in 2007; there are still no tenders for it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JOYCE: So I ask the minister: When are you going to treat the roads in the Liberal districts, which are unsafe, the same as you do the members opposite in the PC districts and call the tenders so we can get the work done this year? Just because you said you are going to do it, does not mean you are. When will they be called?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Route 420, Jackson's Arm intersection; Route 421, upgrade to a section of Gallants Road; Route 403. I will end by giving the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair a good reason to be smiling across the way, a big tender coming out for eighty kilometres from Lodge Bay going towards –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. MCGRATH: – Cartwright Junction, a Liberal district.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, I have to tell the member across the way something we are not smiling about today. On the eve of one of the busiest weekends of the year, we see the ferry service across the Strait of Belle Isle once again disrupted due to lack of icebreaker assistance.

I ask the minister: What is your department doing to –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS DEMPSTER: – restore this vital service across the Strait of Belle Isle?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, as we all know and I have said it several times, this has been a very harsh, long, hard winter, especially with the ferry systems throughout the whole Province. We have had to deal with extreme ice conditions, Marine Atlantic included. Not just the Newfoundland

ferry system but Marine Atlantic, several days where the ice was too thick to get through. We are experiencing that.

I think the member across the way from Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair has to acknowledge that I have certainly done my best to get the ferry running on a regular basis between St. Barbe and Blanc-Sablon again. Unfortunately, I have no control over the ice. If I did, trust me, there would be palm trees growing in St. Barbe right now. We have no control over the Coast Guard with the icebreakers. That is federal jurisdiction, but we will continue to (inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS DEMPSTER: Mr. Speaker, we just heard my colleague talk about \$83 million for consultants, \$4,000 or \$5,000 for a tea party, and \$1,200 for a Twin Otter across the Straits. Mr. Speaker, people are missing medical appointments, commercial traffic is at a standstill, and businesses are suffering. There are no air seats available, everybody is stranded.

Why are the people dependent on this service, primarily the people of Labrador, consistently treated differently than anywhere else in the Province? One hundred thousand people a year rely on this service. Why is she going to Corner Brook and doing a crew change and fueling up? Why are you not lobbying the federal government to make sure that is done down in St. Barbe so we are not continuously disrupted for days on end? We are the only place in the Province where that continues to happen, Mr. Speaker.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. MCGRATH: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, again, the contract for the ferry service from Blanc-Sablon to St. Barbe deals

quite often on weather conditions. I think it was about three or four years ago that this government – we have been monitoring it for the last decade as to whether or not year-round service was available. The weather conditions had changed quite a bit and so we did put in a year-round service, but that year-round service is put in on weather permitted. As I said, this has been a harsh winter.

When you put in a service like that, you also put in the infrastructure to provide services, such as refueling services, in the best possible positions. That is what we have done.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, May 24 weekend is upon us and many families will be heading out to the provincial parks for the first weekend of the season. Camping is certainly a family affair for all people of all ages.

I ask the minister responsible: What family programming will be offered at our provincial parks for this coming season?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SHEA: Mr. Speaker, our parks are opening this weekend and there are many people who take advantage of being able to spend some quiet time with their families in these beautiful parks throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. The people who use these parks, along with the staff in the parks, can determine how they would like to spend their time and what activities they would like to participate in, but I certainly think everyone who takes the time to have their families out there for the weekend will certainly have a very enjoyable experience.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, the park interpretation was discontinued in last year's Budget without notification, slipped under the radar, and will not be offered in our provincial parks again this season. That means no programming for children, no movies, no crafts, no guided hikes, no educational sessions, and no interpretation.

I ask the minister: Why would you downgrade the parks to eliminate such vital programming?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SHEA: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, many families and many individuals take the opportunity to enjoy the parks we have throughout Newfoundland and Labrador and have wonderful experiences when they go there. While they are in the parks, they are able to use the natural areas we have there, whether it means they are going to do some canoeing or some boating, they are going to do hiking. They are going to have times with their families and their friends, whatever they would like to participate in. The services are there for the people to enjoy.

I know I have been in the parks myself. Many people bring in lots of equipment, what they would like to use, and how they like to spend their time in the parks. They will go there again this year, Mr. Speaker. They will have every opportunity to use the services that are there to use, whether they bring their bicycles, their canoes, their kayaks, or whatever they like, Mr. Speaker. They will certainly be able to have an enjoyable (inaudible).

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. OSBORNE: Mr. Speaker, there are no park organized interpretational services any more. That government cut it out. Both provincial and private parks across the Province have seen a resurgence in family camping.

Now that you see the drastic effect of these cuts on our provincial parks and the camping experience, I ask the minister: Will you reinstate the interpretation programs at our provincial parks?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS SHEA: Mr. Speaker, when people visit our parks, when people take their children out or individuals go out, they are able to enjoy what is there and what is offered, whether they go on hikes. I know in Barachois Park they can hike the mountain that is there. There are ponds and lakes. They can canoe, kayak, or take their bicycles. Mr. Speaker, there are even people – I have been in campers where they have the best of technology, watching movies and TV, something that you would not – unless you go and see that these are big, expensive campers with that. It is not just tenting any more.

Mr. Speaker, whether you are in a tent, or whether you are in a modern camper and you bring your family there, they can have a very worthwhile experience. They can use the parks for what they have to offer and they will certainly enjoy that experience, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

More and more people are grappling with the challenge of ensuring their elderly loved ones are getting proper care.

I ask the Minister of Health and Community Services: In the spirit of openness and accountability, will he post online regular, timely updates of wait-lists for long-term care beds under the four regional authorities?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the member of the Third Party for her question today. Long-term care is a matter and a focus. It has been a focus for our government for many years. In fact, in 2012 we released a ten-year strategy that was focused on Close to Home, a long-term strategy care for – long-term care and community support services.

I can tell you that since her question yesterday, I went back to the department and had a closer look at the numbers, the demand for long-term care. I can tell you part of the strategy that we are engaged in is a strategy to improve services to the aging and seniors and people before they reach the need for long-term care, so we can extend the period of time before they actually need to go into long-term care, assist them and promote a higher and better quality of life for them prior to the need to go to long-term care.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS MICHAEL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I really would appreciate knowing what those programs are. It certainly is not home care.

Mr. Speaker, in response to my concern regarding a vulnerable patient moved to Long Pond away from family and community support, the minister responded by noting the drive to Long Pond is only sixteen minutes.

I ask the minister: Is he not aware that many seniors on fixed incomes can neither afford cars or \$100 round-trip taxi rides, and there is no public transportation available?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I think it is important to clarify some of the information that the member opposite has been referring to. I know last night, while she was on one of the radio call-in shows, she referred to it

as Long Harbour; as a matter of fact, she did that two or three times. I am sure she is talking about Long Pond as part of Conception Bay South.

Conception Bay South boundaries the City of St. John's boundary; you can leave the City of St. John's and enter directly into Conception Bay South. They are literally next door to each other.

I can assure the member opposite, and assure the people of the House, and the people of Newfoundland and Labrador that through long-term care we make every effort to ensure that when a person reaches a stage in life where they are required to enter into a long-term care circumstance, that it is done as close to their home as it possibly can, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS MICHAEL: Yes, I am speaking about Long Pond, but we have to look at individual situations, which the government is not doing.

Last year the Minister of Health announced the opening of the protective community residence in Bonavista, which allows people with mild dementia to live independently, adding to those built or planned in Lewisporte, Corner Brook, and Clarenville.

I ask the minister: What is his department's plan for providing protective community residences for people with mild dementia in other parts of the Province?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

This is a very important conservation and debate that we are having here in the House today. I can tell you that there has been a tremendous amount of work done in the development of the

ten-year strategy. As I referred to, there was a very comprehensive process of consultation with seniors. I can tell you, we strongly value the input of seniors. We value the work that they do in their own communities.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: We value the work that organized groups do within their own communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador as well, because they all contribute to the quality of life of the people of the Province and the seniors of the Province.

We will continue to invest in those types of organizations. We will continue to invest in programs throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. We will also continue to invest in the needs for infrastructure.

We look at the long-term needs for long-term care throughout the Province and I can tell you, even though the population is rising, those numbers will stay –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I predicted, the new group home in Stephenville will not be ready by government's May 19 target date. The lives of the youth in care have been thrown into utter chaos.

I ask the minister: Why did he not have a plan to ensure a smooth transition for the moving of these vulnerable young people?

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, at the present time the service provider is indeed seeking to work with the town to find a suitable placement for these youth. I would certainly encourage all involved to recognize the challenge that these young people face. I certainly hope that the provider and the community can find the

agreement that will see that service provided to these youth.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, five days from now is the deadline and they do not even have a house bought, let alone furnished, let alone renovated and rezoned and staff hired and set up and ready to receive these youth. Mr. Speaker, government's callous, ill-thought-out decision to privatize the care of the Province's most vulnerable youth is failing even before it begins.

I ask the minister: Why is the bottom line more important than our moral and legal obligation to provide quality rehabilitation in a safe environment for our most vulnerable youth?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, a term that I used before, I am not going to let the NDP think that they are the only ones who have a monopoly on caring. They are not the only ones who have a monopoly on caring.

Mr. Speaker, to suggest that our bottom line is dollars and putting that ahead of the care for children, that is despicable.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. JACKMAN: That is totally, totally despicable.

Mr. Speaker, these homes, they will find their way forward. If there is a further timeline required, we will look at that. At this particular time, there are teams that are in place, they are making the provisions, they will do the transition, and we will make that as smooth as possible.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre, for a quick question without preamble.

MS ROGERS: Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: How can the privatized rate of \$13 an hour, a babysitter's rate, attract experienced specialized care?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services, for a quick response.

MR. JACKMAN: Mr. Speaker, I can only speak to the reputation of Blue sky. If she is questioning the service that they provide, I would ask her to take that up with the service provider. We are not questioning it.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Time for Question Period has expired.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Notices of Motion

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I give notice, under Standing Order 11, I shall move that the House do not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, May 15, 2014.

Further, I give notice, under Standing Order 11, I shall move that the House do not adjourn at 10:00 p.m. on Thursday, May 15, 2014.

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

Petitions.

Petitions

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

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

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

WHEREAS private and community ambulance operators provide ambulatory and paramedic services to the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador and are compensated for these services by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador; and

WHEREAS the contract for ambulance operators expired in March of 2012; and

WHEREAS the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador completed a review of ambulatory services in the Province, which review was completed August 2013, and released in October 2013;

WHEREAS ambulance operators agreed to hold off from negotiations with government until the ambulance review was complete, and showed good faith; and

WHEREAS government's current position in negotiations has been heavy handed, and will see cuts in ambulance services across the Province;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House to urge the government to negotiate a fair deal with ambulance operators that ensures the safety of our ambulance professionals, as well as the patients in our Province.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this is one that I have presented on one prior occasion here in the House, but I am going to have to continue to present it because this issue will not go away. You have a number of concerned individuals here. Primarily, you have ambulance operators

who are sitting there, and we know that government is playing a divide and conquer game with them. We asked questions in the House of Assembly Estimates session, and of course it was all deferred to Finance, even though we know that the department has actually been having the negotiations with the operators. So it is divide and conquer there.

We have the paramedics themselves who are left out in the wind because they have no say in this. They could not really participate in the review because they were not given the opportunity. They were told to come on in, drive on your own dime and on your own time, to contribute to this. We did not go out and get what they had to say.

At the end of the day, we have the people of these communities – especially in rural Newfoundland and Labrador, and I especially have them out in my district – that are here, they are going to have less emergency coverage when it comes to ambulance services. That is not something that any of us should have to deal with.

We have a government that sits here and tries to obfuscate, they try to confuse the matter and talk about routine services, but when it is not routine is what we are talking about. We are talking about emergency services and red alerts. A red alert is when there is absolutely no coverage in an emergency situation. We have it. It is too bad as it is; it is only going to get worse.

Unfortunately, I believe with this government we are going to see a situation where they react rather than be proactive, and it is going to result in a detrimental, serious consequence, possibly including death, to one of our residents. It is absolutely unfortunate that this government continues to play this game with this group. We are asking them to play fair; negotiate a contract that works for the people of this Province.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

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

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

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I stand today, Mr. Speaker:

WHEREAS we are concerned over the deplorable conditions of the pavement of Hughes Brook hill Route 440; and

WHEREAS many residents of the Towns of Hughes Brooks, Irishtown-Summerside, Meadows, Gillams, McIvers, and Cox's Cove travel this road on a daily basis; and

WHEREAS after repeated requests for repairs in the pavement, the road has continued to deteriorate; and

WHEREAS the ruts in the pavement are creating a safety hazard; and

WHEREAS we feel that the condition of the road presents an accident waiting to happen;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to give serious consideration of making repairs to this road.

Mr. Speaker, today we have a petition from a lot of people from Meadows concerning the road. I asked questions today in the House of Assembly. The minister stood up with a flippant answer that he already made the announcement.

Mr. Speaker, an announcement is not a tender. The minister can stand up and play the games, whatever game he wants because if the tender is not called soon the work will not be done. There have been a number of accidents out in these ruts. It is a major concern, it is a safety concern.

It is a bluff. There is no doubt it is a bluff when you look at all this here. If I change my name to Eddie Coleman would I get it done in six days? Mr. Speaker, that is the kind of condition we are getting.

PREMIER MARSHALL: Do not smear the Coleman's (inaudible).

MR. JOYCE: Here is the Premier now all upset. Mr. Premier, you are talking about smearing someone's company, I am talking

about the safety of the people in the North Shore.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

Direct your comments to the Chair, please.

MR. JOYCE: I am talk about the people of the North Shore. I will do whatever I have to do to get that work done, Mr. Speaker. I am worried about people's lives here.

The Premier can say what he likes to me, Mr. Speaker, I am smearing some company. If that is what it takes for me to get this work done, I will get the work done.

If the Premier drove out the North Shore – drive on that road. Go speak with the councils where last year it was supposed to be done and not done. This year the minister said we already made the announcement. If you do not get the tender done, it may not be done this year. If it is not done this year, you are putting lives at danger.

Do not ask me to sit down and not speak on this, I say to the Premier. I ask this, and the Premier said I am smearing the Coleman family. How about the people who had an accident last week over in Hughes Brook? Why aren't you concerned about the people who went off the road because of the ruts? Be concerned about the residents. Be concerned about them, because I am.

If it takes me to stand here every day with a petition, I say to the Premier, I will do it because I am not worried about some company. I am worried about lives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

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

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

WHEREAS the Family Violence Intervention Court provided a comprehensive approach to domestic violence in a court setting that fully understood and dealt with the complex issues of domestic violence; and

WHEREAS domestic violence continues to be one of the most serious issues facing our Province today –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS ROGERS: – and the cost of the impact of domestic violence is great both economically and in human suffering; and

WHEREAS the Family Violence Intervention Court was welcomed and endorsed by all aspects of the Justice system including the police, the courts, prosecutors, defence counsel, Child, Youth and Family Services, as well as victims, offenders, community agencies and women's groups; and

WHEREAS the recidivism rate for offenders going through the court was 10 per cent compared to 40 per cent for those who did not; and

WHEREAS the budget for the court was only 0.2 per cent of the entire budget of the Department of Justice;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge government to reinstate the Family Violence Intervention Court.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask the members perhaps listen. It is my chance to speak.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I ask members to take all of their private conversations outside the Chamber. The Speaker has acknowledged the Member for St. John's Centre who is delivering a petition. I would ask all other members to hold their speeches until they are recognized by the Speaker.

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

MS ROGERS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I am standing speaking on behalf – every one of these signatures are people from Corner Brook, who know how important the Family Violence Intervention Court is. They actually want it extended to make sure it is available to people all over the Province because they know. They are experts. They know the Family Violence Intervention Court worked.

Mr. Speaker, during Estimates for the Department of Justice – and the government keeps saying it was a budgetary decision – we found millions of dollars that were unspent last year and moved to other unintended expenses, millions of dollars. We are talking about \$500,000. It is about, actually, in some cases saving the lives of women and children.

Why is this government not reversing this decision? They know it is the right thing to do. Is it because it is about saving face? This is not my Family Violence Intervention Court. This was a Family Violence Intervention Court that belonged to the people of the Province and was endorsed by every conceivable stakeholder who works in the area of violence against women. What is wrong with this government that they cannot take the highroad on this? They have a moral and a legal obligation to provide services for women and children who are victims of family violence. What is stopping them besides their own hubris? This is criminal, Mr. Speaker. It is absolutely criminal.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS DEMPSTER: 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 humbly sheweth:

WHEREAS the Strait of Bell Isle is a very important transportation link between Labrador and the Island of Newfoundland; and

WHEREAS both commercial and residential traffic is continuously increasing because of the opening of the Trans Labrador Highway and increased development in Labrador; and

WHEREAS the existing ferry service can no longer effectively handle the traffic; and

WHEREAS there have been many interruptions in the ferry service, especially during the 2014 winter season;

WHEREUPON the undersigned, your petitioners, humbly pray and call upon the House of Assembly to urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to complete a comprehensive feasibility study for a fixed link across the Strait of Bell Isle that would include a geological assessment and a full cost analysis.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, there were many, many issues ongoing this winter with the ice in the Labrador Straits. Hatch Mott MacDonald back in 2004, Mr. Speaker, did a preliminary study which identified that a fixed link would be a viable option once Route 138 was completed. Until that is done, a fixed link that joins our Province with the rest of the country and we have a permanent transportation system in place, we cannot consider ourselves equal to the rest of the country.

It goes far beyond that. Right now, Mr. Speaker, businesses in the district are impacted with this. I just talked to a business with six trucks sitting on the other side in St. Barbe stranded. When you make reservations in advance, when the ferry moves in three days now, they will only be able to get one piece on.

Mr. Speaker, this winter there have been days on end when you could not buy a carton of milk in the district. We are talking about 30,000 people. We are talking about 100,000 passengers who move on this ferry every year.

We know back when the former Premier was there, Mr. Speaker, I have quotes from the *Globe and Mail* where he said what needs to happen now is Quebec needs to complete 138 and Newfoundland needs to construct a fixed link. Yet, Mr. Speaker, we know when Quebec responded that they were interested, the Newfoundland and Labrador Administration at that time changed and there was no follow up done. This has been a very trying year for marine traffic.

Mr. Speaker, a fixed link will reduce the cost of goods. It will impact everybody in the Province. Right now, we know that the NL consumer association is saying that everyone in the Province is paying between 4 per cent and 25 per cent more for their product because of the delays, the costs, and the spoilage due to the present ferry system.

In a completed feasibility study, the key thing will identify that present subsidies being paid by this government, by the Quebec government, and the federal government over a twenty year (inaudible) –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The member's time has expired.

The hon. the Member for The Straits – White Bay North.

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS Route 438 is the primary highway for residents of Grandois, St. Julien's and Croque; and

WHEREAS the current gravel road conditions are dangerous for travel, given size of potholes and debris embedded in the road; and

WHEREAS it is government's obligation to provide basic infrastructure to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians; and

WHEREAS this is the primary link for residents to health care and essential services and the enhancement is needed for safety reasons.

We, the undersigned, petition the House of Assembly to urge government to allocate funds under the provincial roads maintenance program to upgrade this section of Route 438.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I talked about this particular road in the district; it is about thirty kilometres. It is a former woods road, basically, where there are tree stumps, former logs, that have had gravel thrown over it and they are starting to reappear.

The petitioners here are not asking to have these thirty kilometres of road paved. They are just asking for, on a continuous basis, especially in the spring, to have maintenance happen so that here are improvements because they do have to travel this road on a daily regular basis. Many of the workers here commute to Main Brook or they commute to Conche to work in fish plant processing facilities there. All their other services, all the business, all the commerce, all the government services take place outside of their community.

They would like to commend what the Department of Transportation and Works has already done. They have already put different mud and silt patch down and a little bit of rock, but there needs to be more done. There needs to be that commitment, that we do have the stone there, that we can do regular maintenance to these gravel roads that have a small population and need to see that improvement.

So I am putting this petition forward based on petitioners in my district, in Croque, Grandois and St. Julien's. I think that it is a small marginal cost when you look at maintaining a basic piece of infrastructure. I am not talking

for asphalt here this in particular case, just regular upgrades and maintenance to their road.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

WHEREAS there are extreme overcrowding issues in St. Peter's Elementary and Mount Pearl Senior High; a direct result of 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, primarily capital investment as a preferred option; and

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

WHEREAS the government has intervened in board decisions in the past, such as in 2005 in Bishop's Falls during a by-election where they reversed 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.

As in duty bound, your petitioners will ever pray.

Mr. Speaker, I am after presenting this petition now a number of times, and I have many more to present. Almost on a daily basis, I am getting more petitions coming in. As a matter of fact, I have to meet with a young student in my district this evening that has a number of them he wants to present to me as it relates to this particular issue.

Mr. Speaker, as I have said in the past, this need not have happened. Had the Department of Education and certainly the then Eastern School District acted upon the overcrowding concerns over the last number of years instead of just letting it slide, letting it slide, letting it slide to the point now where we have all the speciality space taken up at St. Peter's Elementary, all of the speciality space taken up at Mount Pearl Senior High, we have had to chop it all up into classroom space. Now, even with that done, we have even more kids coming and nowhere to put them. Now we are hearing, of course, that in addition to St. Peter's Elementary being all chopped up to pieces, now this solution is going to see Newtown Elementary likewise, chopped up into pieces.

That is definitely not acceptable, Mr. Speaker. The wrong decision was made here. I am calling upon the new Minister of Education to do the right thing. I am calling upon the new Minister of Education to actually listen to the students, to actually listen to the teachers, to actually listen to the parents and the families in Mount Pearl, do the right thing, intervene in this matter, have this decision revisited and provide the appropriate funding so that the board can make some sensible decisions.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. KING: Mr. Speaker, as per Standing Order 32, Orders of the Day, I move, seconded by the Minister of Environment and Conservation, that the House now move to Orders of the Day.

MR. SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that we now move to Orders of the Day.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Motion carried.

Orders of the Day.

Orders of the Day

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Pursuant to Standing Order 11, I move, seconded by the Minister of Environment and Conservation, that the House not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. today, Tuesday, May 13, 2014.

MR. SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that this House do not adjourn at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, May 13, 2014.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Motion carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Once again, pursuant to Standing Order 11, I move, seconded by the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services, that the House not adjourn at 10:00 p.m., Tuesday, May 13, 2014.

MR. SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that this House do not adjourn at 10:00 p.m. on Tuesday, May 13, 2014.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Motion carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Under second reading of a bill, I call from the Order Paper, Order 9, second reading of An Act To Amend The Student Financial Assistance Act, Bill 16.

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

MR. O'BRIEN: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Environment and Conservation, that Bill 16, An Act To Amend The Student Financial Assistance Act, be read a second time.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that Bill 16, An Act To Amend The Student Financial Assistance Act, be now read a second time.

Motion, second reading of a bill, "An Act To Amend The Student Financial Assistance Act". (Bill 16)

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

MR. O'BRIEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am happy to get up in my place in regard to this amendment. It is a piece of housekeeping; in essence, that is exactly what it is. We have, over the last number of years, done some substantial things for our students in Newfoundland and Labrador, all in the post-secondary side, Mr. Speaker, in regard to Memorial University, the Marine Institute, the College of the North Atlantic, and as well in the private sector.

Some of the areas we have invested, which one of them was highlighted in this Budget, were the reducing of student debt in that we are now going to convert all student loans to grants over the next two years. That will be about a \$14.7 million investment over those two years and approximately \$50.6 million over the next five years.

Mr. Speaker, as I just said as well, about 7,000 students will avail of the upfront grants. We have invested in regard to the tuition freeze. Again this year we invested about \$5.1 million

to continue the tuition freeze. That has put the total investment of the provincial government, since 2005, at the total of about \$283 million to maintain that tuition freeze in Newfoundland and Labrador. That puts us as leaders in the country in regard to how we supported our students, and how we have engaged our youth.

That is not referencing what we have done in regard to the labour market training programs that we have. It is mainly populated in regard to student population by youth in our Province, Mr. Speaker, who would avail of those particular programs in CNA and the private colleges to become skilled tradespeople in the Province, and avail of the opportunities and the economic growth that we see in our Province.

In saying all that, Mr. Speaker, in regard to those investments and this one in particular, there is the \$14.7 million investment over the next two years with a \$50.6 million investment over the five years. It is incumbent on us as a government to protect the money that we spend. In this case here, this amendment will enable us to draft some regulations around the particular amendment and put some policies in place to address that issue. That is the protection of the investment that we have made in our students.

Most of the 7,000 students who will receive the upfront grants will make great use of them. Most of them, if not all of them, when they receive it – and we are going to try to get that very soon after they attend the particular post-secondary education facility that they would choose to further their education, they will actually get that very quickly. As a matter of fact, within the first week that they actually come to St. John's or if they are from St. John's that they register. Then they will spend that money, Mr. Speaker.

We must remember that most of the cost to a student is in the first couple of weeks after they get here in regard to Memorial University. They have to buy textbooks. They have to buy certain things they need in regard to pursuing their education. They have to invest in probably a laptop or whatever it may be, Mr. Speaker. The bottom line of what I am saying is the amount they get in regard to that grant is usually spent within the first number of days that they get here.

In saying that, Mr. Speaker, we might have a number of those students who might for some reason or another decide university is not right for me, I do not want to be at this. So off they go and they do not pursue a post-secondary education. We have to have an ability to recover that grant. It is really important for a number of reasons why we should recover that grant.

Number one is the student should not have it because the student is not in school. The second thing is when we recover it, it enables us to revert that number into the pot again and service more students, other students who might avail of that grant as well. So we recover the money, it goes back into the pot and is reverted into the system again to other students we might want to cover off. It is very important that this is clearly understood.

The other piece at this time that I want to reference is – and I (inaudible) my officials. I want to make absolutely sure that when we develop those regulations and policies, that there is a mechanism in place for appeal. Because there might be some extenuating circumstances where a student might not be able to go forward. They might be diagnosed with some type of a sickness and might have to suspend their intention in regard to pursuing a particular post-secondary education faculty, and then decide they might come back at a later time when they are in better health.

I think that particular person should have the mechanism in place where they should not have to pay. Because they would not have foreseen such a circumstance that they would have a challenge in regard to pursuing their dreams. I think we should be able to help them. So I made sure that an appeal process was in place.

It is important to point out as well, Mr. Speaker, that this amendment only deals with creating legislative authority to develop that regulatory process and required policies to enable us to recover that amount of money. I do not anticipate for a second, Mr. Speaker, there is going to be a whole lot of action in regard to recovery process. I think Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, our students in the high school system are absolutely pursuing their careers and their dreams. I see that all the time. I think there are more and more of our graduates

coming out of the high school programs, going into the college system, or going into Memorial University, Marine Institute. Our numbers are up, and I see it day-in, day-out.

It is great to actually go to a graduation or a prom or a cap-and-gown ceremony. Actually, when they are announcing the person's name walking across the stage, in my case, in Gander, that is done the Christmas after. They have already done one semester in their chosen career path and they mention where they are. It is great to be able to sit, listen, and see these people with the expressions on their face as they go across that stage. Not only are they proud to have achieved what they have achieved in their high school programs, but as well they have gone on to the post-secondary side and they are pursuing that particular dream they have.

Mr. Speaker, I am not going to talk too long on this particular amendment. I think in my mind we have invested heavily in regard to our students. We have engaged with our students right across this Province. As a matter of fact, I have met with the student body on maybe three or four occasions since October alone. I like to listen to what they say. They give me suggestions in regard to what they see as their challenges and what I could do as the minister responsible for post-secondary education to relieve some of those challenges.

One of the things I heard loud and clear was that they need loans converted to grants. That would reduce their debt tremendously and give them an opportunity at life. Coming out of the system with less debt, they are able to pursue their other dreams in regard to owning a vehicle, to buying a house, to pursuing other interests such as vacations, or whatever it may be.

I think we have done well in regard to our government in enabling students to do just that. I really believe that in my heart and my soul, especially when you hear people from elsewhere in Canada who reference Newfoundland and Labrador as being the leaders in the country.

I know in this case here, in regard to the conversion of loans to grants, there was a celebration day at Memorial University. They invited all MUN students to come and celebrate a great day. I was not there. I was not able to be

there. I was elsewhere in the Province, but I know there were others there, people from in this House here, on this side of the House and on the other side of the House, who went. I think it was a great day. It was a great day for students and a great day for Newfoundland and Labrador – really a great day.

I think, in regard to the investments we have made as a government since 2005 in our students, it is a wise investment. We hear and heard long, a lot of people have referenced the students as our future. Well, the bottom line of it is that we have recognized that; they are the future. That is the reason why, not only have we invested in programs to reduce their debt, we have also invested heavily in regard to their infrastructure. They absolutely need quality education, and I think Memorial University is absolutely providing that. I think the College of the North Atlantic is absolutely providing that, and Marine Institute is absolutely providing that type of standard that we all expect in Newfoundland and Labrador.

As a matter of fact, one of the reasons – and a lot of people think that the only reason that we have an influx of students from outside the Province pursuing their dreams at Memorial University is just because it is cheaper, but it is not that at all. Memorial University has some quality programs. We even have professors who are coming from away replacing professors who do not want to be there anymore.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, that is something else. As a matter of fact, I could probably make a speech on that alone. I will not, because it has nothing to do with this amendment. I see that you are smiling and letting me away with a little bit of a grey area here, and I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. I had to reference it because –

MR. SPEAKER: You are shifting beyond grey; you are getting pretty black there now, so bring yourself back.

MR. O'BRIEN: I will bring myself back now, Mr. Speaker.

I think it is good to reference those things in regard to this amendment. The people of the Province, I think, recognize that we have invested heavily in our post-secondary education

system. I really think that it is a wise investment, but I think as well, as this amendment speaks to, that we have to protect that investment. Even though we invest, we cannot have it abused and we have to make sure that we have a recovery system in place just in case a person might take advantage of it for some reason or another.

As well, I want to reference one more time before I take my place in this House – and I welcome any other comments from across the House or by my own colleagues on this side of the House – in that I also firmly believe that you have to have an appeal system in place just in case there are students who might be challenged in some way or another, legitimately challenged, that they did not foresee when they came here to Memorial University from wherever they came from in Newfoundland and Labrador, including the Northeast Avalon and the Avalon to pursue their dreams, that they should be able to be relieved of that particular grant if that challenge is legitimate, Mr. Speaker.

With that, again I say that this is really an amendment that is a housekeeping amendment, that piece here in the House. It is an important piece because it protects the investment of the dollars that we would invest in those particular students and Memorial University, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

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

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a pleasure for me to stand and speak to this Bill 16, An Act To Amend The Student Financial Assistance Act. I would just like to say off the top, thank you to the officials from the Department of Advanced Education and Skills for providing us with a briefing regarding the legislation. It was extremely helpful, not only to get information regarding this legislation, this particular investment, but also to get a better understanding of some of the other issues that the financial aid division is facing, and some of the logistical issues when it comes to the disbursement of student loans and so on. It is very, very helpful.

I would like to say that as somebody who has a history of student advocacy that really goes back I suppose to my twenties, I believe this is good legislation. This is a good policy and it is a long time coming.

I just want to go back over a little bit of the history here. We have an interesting history of student financial aid in Newfoundland and Labrador. If we look back to the late 1960s, we even had a policy in place where not only was there no tuition, but students received sort of a salary, a bursary, that paid them to go to school, much like what a grant would really entail today.

There has been a lot of change through the 1970s, through the 1980s, and the 1990s, a lot of pressure on this Province, especially at times when the federal government has had financial difficulty. Difficulty with filling the Treasury and periods of economic hardship in this Province, to say nothing of the period following the cod moratoriums in 1992 when student financial aid and tuition, post-secondary education in this Province came under significant strain.

Students have been lobbying for this particular policy for some time. As was pointed out last night in the debate here in the Legislature on the Budget, they have shown themselves to be quite effective over the years in lobbying for progressive changes to student financial aid and other policies associated with post-secondary education in this Province.

I have to point out the minister was talking about students coming here from elsewhere. The last large-scale study I oversaw at Memorial University prior to my election in 2011 culminated in a report called *Matriculating Eastward* and it looked at Atlantic Canadian students coming to this Province to study, and coming to Memorial University in particular, as a result of our policies on tuition.

In the subsequent years since I got elected, a graduate student by the name of Melanie Greene has done a very good job of putting that research out there. In fact, she just had a second article published in an academic journal now reporting some of the results of what the tuition policies have done to attract students here, coming here physically and also studying via distance. There

has been a lot of work done and she continues to hammer that out.

I am just going to come back to that in a while, but during the 2011 election, in the lead-up to that, the Canadian Federation of Students, Newfoundland and Labrador produced a document around financial aid and other changes they were hoping for. The three political parties adopted pieces of that particular platform document, the students' platform document, into their own political policies. In the end, all three political parties advocated doing this.

After the election in 2011, I know the former Minister of Advanced Education and Skills along with the then Premier went down to Memorial University. I guess it was around their day of action, which was trying to draw attention to student issues on campus. The Premier and the former Minister of Advanced Education and Skills then signed a pledge on this particular issue, on the issue of access to post-secondary education. Maybe the minister signed it as well. I remember it was widely reported subsequent to that the former Premier opining about her wanting to see the elimination of tuition altogether, more or less going back to where the Province was in the 1960s.

Now, not much was done after that. I worked with students across the Province to produce a petition, which I presented a number of times here in the House of Assembly, around grants, not loans. I presented that several times. I am certainly not taking any credit myself for this getting done because I believe the students themselves, through their own advocacy efforts, deserve all of the credit here.

I note that in an article last July, the then Acting Minister of Advanced Education and Skills, I believe he declined to be interviewed by *The Telegram* newspaper, but there was an article in *The Telegram* last July. I remember reading it when I was out on a camping trip. I believe I was out on the beautiful Bonavista Peninsula, out in Lockston Path Provincial Park, and I remember reading in the newspaper about this particular issue. I guess the reporter who wrote it expressed some skepticism, as did the Opposition Parties, as to whether or not this particular policy was ever going to see the light

of day. I know that the then Acting Minister of Advanced Education and Skills pointed back to their platform document and said that this policy would be subject to financial considerations.

I guess really it was subject to financial considerations because one of the key considerations would be whether or not the government would decide to borrow \$1 billion this year to finance its election platform Budget. So, obviously, that financial consideration was considered and government decided to borrow the money. Now we have this policy and a number of other things that the government is now trotting out through the door and bringing to the floor, as it struggles in the face of declining opinion polls and other difficulties that the government has, as a result of it having to stand on its record.

Of course, we see that across the country when it comes to the evolution of government, to sort of the wax and the wane and the ebb and the flow of the political process.

Basically, one of the things that is going on here is that while it appears that this policy is going to be – because I think there is some misunderstanding. I think there is some difficulty sometimes trying to communicate things to people. Because when things are announced in the Budget it seems like it is imminent, like the Corner Brook hospital, for example. It seems like it is imminent. It seems like it is going to happen this year, or very soon, and this is not going to happen this year. This is going to happen, be fully implemented, on August 1, 2015. In August of this year, the grant portion will be increased by \$20 and the loan portion will be reduced by \$20. In the following year, it will come into full force.

Obviously, that is going to be a challenge to implement because you are sort of just more or less tweaking it this year and then bringing it fully in. So, instead of a policy where you come in and you change it and bring it in, this phase-in process will obviously add an extra step.

If you know anything about Information Technology, because we did pass a bill here in the Legislature – I am wondering if it was last year, if it was not last year it was the year before

with respect to the electronic disbursement of financial aid.

A lot of this stuff is keyed in now and it is really efficient, I have to say that. The public servants who co-ordinate all of this, oversee it, get down to the nitty-gritty and do the hard work here, they did an excellent job and these loans are provided to students on the first day of class as a result of that bill. We pass in harmonization that has taken place with the federal student loan program.

I am sure there are people here, lots of MUN graduates, a lot of Memorial University graduates here in the Legislature, you remember lining up to get your student loan in the Thompson Student Centre. It could be weeks into your semester before you get a few bucks to buy your books. Sometimes you would not get a chance to get a deal on your books because you are waiting for money. We do not have that problem anymore and it is a good credit, I think, to the previous piece of legislation that we passed. I do not think that was really obvious at the time, but that is one of the great things that have happened.

Currently, when it comes to the loan and grant combination system that we have, the students receive the loan portion upfront and then the grant portion is disbursed to them six to eight weeks following the commencement of their academic term. Whether that is at Memorial University of Newfoundland, the Grenfell campus, the Corner Brook campus, whether at Marine Institute or the College of the North Atlantic, one of the campuses there, or one of the private training institutions that is more or less the way it works now.

That is the way I assume it is going to happen in the coming year. While there will be a change in the amounts, the \$20 up and the \$20 down, in the subsequent year when this comes into full force in the academic year that begins in September of 2015, the full amount of the grant will be dispersed right away. Students will receive the full amount right away. Well, immediately we sort of create questions about oh well, what if – and look, by and large, for the most part, there is not going to be wide-scale abuse, I do not think. I do not think people are nefarious or ill intended in that way. There are

certainly exceptions to every rule, but we have to trust people on their merit and on their word and on their signature.

So, everybody will receive the funds upfront. Now, in the event where someone does not continue into the semester, they drop out for some reason – that happens all the time; students drop out for a variety of reasons. They might drop out because you are just are not suited, you are just are not interested in the program that you are enrolled in; that happens. Students drop out for a variety of other reasons: illness, bereavement, issues that are family related, and a variety of different intervening circumstances can come into place. A lot of the times we hope that students are able to persevere and be resilient and continue, but inevitably life intervenes sometimes and people do have to step back and discontinue their studies.

If that happens – and that is why I think there is some confusion with respect to the wording of this bill. What the government is doing through its policy is converting the loans into grants; but if you read the explanatory note on the bill it says that it “will allow the minister to make regulations with respect to converting grants to student loans.” It seems like they have it wrong in the explanatory note; but you have to understand what is going to happen is, in the event that someone receives the full amount of the grant upfront and they discontinue their studies and there is not a way to claw it back or the person does not pay it back, if the person enrolls again in January or after Christmas or what have you for another term and they get a student loan, then you can claw back the amount that was over paid. If somebody received a sixteen-week grant, they were in school for eight weeks, they had to pay rent and they had to have food and they probably bought supplies and books and what have you, but they did not have that weekly expense cost that is accounted for in the loan and grant program or in the grant program. They did not incur that cost for eight weeks. That money has to be paid back somehow.

You can pay it back. You can write a cheque and pay it back. You can have it clawed back on the disbursement of the grant that you get in the subsequent semester; or let’s say you do not enrol in the next semester, maybe you do not go

to post-secondary again at all for years or ever again, you have to try to find a way to recoup those funds that were paid out of the public purse through this grant. What would happen then is the minister has the authority, through regulation, to convert that grant into a loan so it can be returned and repaid as if it was a loan. I think that is the sort of contradiction.

When we looked at the explanatory note on here, it seems to run counter to what the policy is doing. This piece of legislation is more or less enabling the minister to make that conversion in order to ensure that those who are ineligible for the grant disbursement, pay it back through as if it was a student loan in the event there was an over award and there is not another mechanism to get it repaid, whether through an adjustment, or we would say a clawback in the subsequent semester, or through an immediate repayment.

That is basically it. I think it is relatively straightforward. I would add a cautionary note however, and I have said this here in the House of Assembly before. I think it is worthy of mentioning again.

Everyone here will have to agree that policies such as this – we all agree are good policies – should be based on evidence. Students feel like yes, they have the evidence by virtue of their own experience in the post-secondary system, that it is an arduous process of paying for education and paying for loans and all of that. They have personal experience that provides that evidence. I do not dispute that. There is a need to conduct further follow-up studies.

Remember I told you the last large-scale study that I worked on at Memorial University, we looked at the tuition fee policy, and we looked at how it was attracting students from outside of the Province. Because there was all of this evidence that there were declining enrolments or stagnant enrolments at universities in other Atlantic Provinces in the Maritimes while ours were going up.

We had this population of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick students, and some PEI students, that were going up. So we went out and we interviewed them. We talked to them. We asked them why. We tried to connect the dots. We tried to see whether or not what we thought

based on the enrolment data was in fact the case. That is what we should do here. When we are taking taxpayers' dollars and investing it in new programs like this one, whereby we are more or less paying out into a grant for students to go to school, we should try to find out what the outcomes are, especially through surveys, interviews, focus groups, and those sorts of things.

Not just surveys, too; you can analyze the registrarial data. You can look at who enrolled, who showed up, who did not show up, how they progressed, and how quickly they progressed. We always talk about timely completion, whether students complete their college or university program within the recommended period of time for completion of that program. In the case of a Bachelor of Arts, that would be four years. Is that happening? Is it making it easier? Are they finishing? Is it making things longer or shorter? Do we have more graduations? Do we have fewer completions? There are all sorts of questions to be answered here.

What about the transition to the workforce? Is it easier? What about the impact on their household spending? Does it make it easier for them to get a mortgage? Does it make it easier for them to get a car loan? Does it make it easier for them to have their own children, get an RESP, and save for their child's post-secondary education themselves?

Those are all sorts of important questions. I think the unfortunate thing that has gone on in the last decade or so is that a lot of those programs we had, and study and analysis, the ambitiousness towards evidence-based policy, has really receded. We do not do that anymore. I do not know why. Some people say: Oh, well, you do not want to know. You do not want to know what the answer is because you want to think you are right. I do not know. I do not really believe that.

I think we want to know that these policies are sound, it is a good investment of taxpayers' money, and we can look at data, whether that is, like I said, through surveys, registrarial data, or interviews with post-secondary students and graduates. We look at all of that say: Yes, see? Maybe that will enable us to take the next step

into other areas that are reasonably progressive because the data will show what sorts of tools we need and what policy instruments we need to enact and to create in order to further build the post-secondary system, create more access, attract students from elsewhere, and so on and so forth.

I think one of the areas we really ought to be looking at is who is really left out. We have had a lot of universal programs, some based on needs such as this one, but what is happening with students with disabilities? What is happening with our Aboriginal youth? What is happening with our rural youth versus our urban youth? There are different groups in our society of Newfoundland and Labrador youth who are differently impacted by the challenges of the post-secondary system.

Then what is happening with older learners? Are policies such as this one helping them? Is this something that is helping them to participate at a greater rate in college or university? Because if we look at that Outlook 2020 document, we see all these jobs are becoming available but we know the vast majority of jobs that are going to be available over the next decade require some form of post-secondary education, whether it is a certificate of qualification in a trade, or a college diploma or certificate, or some certification from a university.

We know those jobs are going to be open, and we know our young people and our not-so-young people need to be trained. We know when there are major adjustments in our economy, in our workforce – and they are happening in some sectors, it is still happening – we know that we need to enable people to go one or another direction to change their career path, because we know people have many jobs throughout the course of their careers today. Not like when many of us were going through our careers. I am a little younger, so maybe it has been a little different for me, but I am not looking at you, minister.

In any case, I think I will close it off there. I think it is really important to have evidence-based policy. It really enables us to have even better legislation and policies. I do support this, and I will be happy to vote in favour.

Thank you very much.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Verge): The hon. the Member for Port au Port.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CORNETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is indeed a pleasure and honour to stand in this House this afternoon to debate Bill 16, An Act To Amend The Student Financial Assistance Act.

Mr. Speaker, as the explanatory note says, "This Bill would amend the Student Financial Assistance Act to allow the minister to make regulations with respect to converting grants to student loans."

Mr. Speaker, if you look at this piece of legislation this afternoon and you read the analysis, under part 1, section (f), it says, "the Student Financial Assistance Act is repealed and the following substituted: (f) respecting the recovery of student loans, awards and grants given in error or in excess of an amount permissible under this Act including the circumstances under which all or part of a grant is to be converted into a student loan". Mr. Speaker, in our efforts to continue supporting affordable and accessible post-secondary education here in this Province, our Budget just released a couple of months ago now provides \$14.7 million over two years to eliminate the provincial student loans, an approximate investment of \$50.6 million over five years.

Mr. Speaker, when we look at the student assistance, student aid package here in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, we are the envy of the country. Students from outside the Province look at this Province as the most affordable and accessible place to get post-secondary education. I would say we are probably number one on the radar.

This legislation will amend the Student Financial Assistance Act to allow for the recovery of student grants that had been deemed ineligible through a system of repayments similar to the student loan. Mr. Speaker, as the

minister alluded to previously in his remarks, the minister said that every year approximately 7,000 students receive upfront grants, assistance to help pay for their post-secondary education. This legislative amendment this afternoon will allow for the recovery of any grants that are deemed to be ineligible.

Mr. Speaker, these changes that we are debating this afternoon – and hopefully we will get unanimous consent from the House of Assembly and all members of the House because this will certainly aid students in our Province and outside of our Province who are coming to do schooling here in our Province. These changes will help the provincial government retrieve ineligible portions of a grant and utilize those funds to assist students in their post-secondary education and career goals.

Mr. Speaker, it is very important to note and to point out that this amendment only deals with creating the legislative authority to develop the regulatory process and required policies. Once the amendment has been approved, regulations and policies will be finalized.

With the complete elimination of the provincial student loans and replacement with up-front, needs-based grants, students will see a significant reduction in the amount to be repaid as a student loan. Let me give you a couple of examples, Mr. Speaker. For example, a student attending the College of the North Atlantic completing a one-year program will benefit by having his or her average student loan monthly payments reduced by 42.1 per cent. Saying that, when we convert it to dollars, means they will go from \$113 per month to \$67 per month.

Interestingly enough, a student at Memorial University of Newfoundland completing a four-year undergraduate program will benefit by having his or her average student loan monthly payments reduced by 44.4 per cent; from \$300 per month to \$167 per month. This amendment will also allow for the arranging of a payment schedule that will be similar to a student loan.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you and I want to tell the people in the Province, as well, that since 2005 our government has invested more than \$282 million to freeze tuition, making Newfoundland and Labrador students the envy

of the country. It is the hope of our provincial government that these types of initiatives will strongly encourage students to pursue their post-secondary education in this Province and that they will choose to stay here and play a role in the Province's continued success. We all know, Mr. Speaker, that the job outlook in Newfoundland and Labrador is very strong and, in the coming years, we will need a well-educated workforce to meet the labour demand.

When we look at the student assistance programs and the student aid programs that we have in our Province, we also have to look at the investments that have been made in the post-secondary institutions as well. To have an educated population, to have people go on to post-secondary education, we need to have institutions that will meet those demands and meet those market demands and meet those education demands as well.

So, Mr. Speaker, what we have done through Budget 2014 – I am just going to highlight or name some of the investments. In the College of the North Atlantic, \$1.5 million to support high-demand, high-priority programs. At MUN's Fisheries and Marine Institute, \$1.9 million to increase base funding, that is year three of a three-year initiative at the Fisheries and Marine Institute, to continue the expansion of educational programming, research and student services for continued growth in the ocean sector.

Mr. Speaker, we look at MUN Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science, \$1.1 million investment to continue the expansion of the Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science at Memorial, year three of an eight-year initiative in the priority areas of ocean, Arctic and offshore energy to support major project development and encourage private sector industry partnerships. This investment, Mr. Speaker, will also support increasing enrolment of undergraduate and graduate students at the faculty.

When we talk about students, we look at the initiatives we have for students in regard to summer employment. Mr. Speaker, our government –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I would ask the member to make his comments relative to the bill that we are discussing.

MR. CORNETT: Mr. Speaker, when we look at our investments in students in the Province, we are very proud of our initiatives. We are proud of our record, and we remain committed to supporting post-secondary students and institutions in the years ahead in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you for the occasion to speak on this bill this afternoon.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MS DEMPSTER: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, as the provincial critic for Advanced Education and Skills, am happy to stand and speak for a few minutes to Bill 16, An Act To Amend The Student Financial Assistance Act.

Any time, Mr. Speaker, that we are investing in students and helping make life easier for students, I believe that is paying dividends back. When you look back, you see that this was a commitment made by this government back in 2011, so we have been waiting a little while. It was a Blue Book commitment that stated we would eliminate the provincial student loan over four years and replace it with an up-front, needs-based program.

Mr. Speaker, we know that the Canadian Federation of Students and many of our post-secondary groups have been calling on this for some time. We are very happy to see now that it is coming down and that it will be phased in over a two-year period.

Investing in post-secondary education of citizens, we know that it just makes good sense all the way around because there are many studies already that show that education is a primary deterrent of health. So, you see the two are closely linked. Replacing the provincial portion of the student loan with a needs-based grant; by doing that, we are going to be lowering the financial burden of our students and allowing them to get on their feet when they come out of

school. This, in turn, will help to make a stronger economy here in Newfoundland and Labrador. This is a very positive step.

By coming out and having less debt, they then have more money to purchase a home. Things that young families need when they are starting out, a car. It will have a positive trickle-down effect, I believe, on the effects to health care as well, given the links that we know are there that exist between education, income, and health.

We know there is a direct link between low education levels and very low income. Often people with very low income have the poorest health. By investing I say into the post-secondary students and helping them, it is going to pay dividends back.

Mr. Speaker, we know a full grant system will help to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor. That is a very positive thing for the Province. Low-income students face increased barriers. I saw that many times in my two decades of working with students in rural communities. By helping them graduate school now without being saddled with debt of astronomical proportions, I believe it is socially and economically responsible. It is responsible for government to do this. I am very, very happy to see they are implementing a plan, carrying out a commitment they made a number of years ago.

Mr. Speaker, given the rural reality of our Province – more than half of the Province made up of rural – students in rural communities have to incur much more expense than those living closer to the service, closer to the post-secondary institutions. I am going to reference to my district. Everyone here in the House has heard me stand up many times and talk about our transportation issues and the high cost. You can imagine a student who wants to go home for Christmas and wants to go home during Easter or something like that.

Mr. Speaker, I remember back in the late 1980s when I was here at Memorial, most of the people in my class were going down south for a week on Easter break. They were doing that at a much lower cost than what I was trying to get home to Labrador for. I was paying \$500 for a return ticket all those years ago back in the late 1980s.

By replacing the student loans with a needs-based grant, it is certainly going to help the people in rural communities, Mr. Speaker. Students who come from many, many situations where both of the parents are on fixed income and so there is a limitation there with the support they can provide to the students.

Mr. Speaker, we know that Budget 2014 committed to this. Also, if we look back we see that Budget 2012 and Budget 2013 alluded to this. When you look a little deeper, you see the amount of student financial services in the last year has actually taken a little dip from prior years.

Mr. Speaker, just to explain for the people who might be watching and wondering how the provincial Student Aid program works, we know that depending on your assessed need you could receive up to \$140 per week of study in provincial loans and grants. The first \$60 of the \$140 is a repayable student loan. Then we know that if your assessed need for the provincial portion exceeds \$60 per week, the remaining amount, up to the maximum of \$80 per week, will be issued in the form of a non-repayable grant.

We know the eligibility is determined when you apply for a student loan for full-time studies. I think it is a very positive thing, Mr. Speaker, that this grant is then deposited upfront, right into your bank account. My colleague referenced the lining up and having long waits to collect your eligibility certificate in the past in order to get your funds.

It is true that when you come in, and especially students from rural, there is a lot of money you need out of pocket in the first few weeks. When you come in and you are securing an apartment, Mr. Speaker, the damage deposit that you pay. Sometimes right now in the city, because it is very difficult to get an apartment and the cost is high, students from my district are actually having to start paying for an apartment perhaps as early as June or July. They are really taxed. The income into those homes, some homes that have two and three students entering into post-secondary the one time, the financial support is just not there. These are the kinds of families that by replacing the student loans with the

needs-based grants are going to be helped tremendously from this.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, the tuition freeze was a wonderful thing in this Province. We know that was something that was implemented by a Liberal government back in 1999. That has certainly helped. Now I am happy to see that we are taking this one step further. In addition to a tuition freeze, we are going to completely work toward eliminating the loans all together.

Mr. Speaker, I do want to mention that the Canadian Federation of Students has estimated that for an investment of approximately \$13 million per year, the remaining provincial loan could be replaced with a full provincial loan program of non-repayable grants that would help over 7,000 students per year. There is a point of clarity and we can ask that later when we are asking questions because that number I just quoted does not quite jive with the government's commitment to the Canadian Federation of Students in 2011 of the \$18.9 million over four years.

Mr. Speaker, I am just going to speak for a moment on the impact of debt on students. Debt is responsible for lower levels of university and college completion, not to mention, Mr. Speaker, the financial stress that is disproportionately borne by those from low-income backgrounds. As I mentioned, especially in rural communities where families live on fixed income, it is unbelievable what some people are getting by with in my district; \$1,000, \$1,500 a month into the home. They simply do not have the money. So those families will benefit tremendously, Mr. Speaker, from this needs-based grant program.

Mr. Speaker, if we are talking about eliminating poverty, if we are talking about growing the population, education is the key. I think it was yesterday I quoted it here, that Nelson Mandela quote that I love. He said: education is the weapon in which we can use to change the world.

Mr. Speaker, we need to start doing more things to target low-income families, to put the supports in place so that kids who are coming from low-income families, kids who come from homes where they are on fixed income, their

parents are, they need to be given an opportunity to go out and have a college degree and get a college diploma or acquire a university degree the same way that families who are more well-to-do would be able to afford. These are the kinds of things that bridges the gap in our society between the very low-income, the working poor, to the more wealthy in our Province.

I am not that old, I am not going to date myself, but I remember growing up as a teenager most of the people, especially the young men along our rural communities, dropped out of high school and they went in the fishing boat. Even if they had a dream of going to university, the money just was not there in the home. Big families in small communities, many with eight and ten children. The older children always worked to help provide an income so that the basic needs of the family were met, which often came down to food and raiment, clothing and food. Now, Mr. Speaker, students all around Newfoundland and Labrador will benefit from this act.

I am very pleased to be able to speak to it today, Mr. Speaker. We see that despite more than ten years of progressive policy regarding tuition fees, user fees have increased by over 71 per cent since 1992-1993. User fees have increased by over 71 per cent – over four times the rate of inflation. So again, this just hammers home for us the reality and the great, pressing need that there is for us to implement this act, Bill 16, An Act To Amend The Student Financial Assistance Act.

In addition to the user fees that are up by 71 per cent, we know that students are facing rising rental cost, high gas and oil bills, increasing textbook cost, and an overall increase in the cost of living. In Labrador, we do have a campus in Labrador City, and with the road connection students have been looking to that campus as an option. There are some programs offered at that campus in Labrador City that are not offered anywhere else around the Province, like the mining technician program.

Mr. Speaker, it sad, the irony in it, because the graduate success rate of students getting jobs coming out of that mining tech program for a number of years consistently have been about 95

per cent; yet, because of the boom in Labrador City, the cost of rental there has gone up astronomically. The last two or three years that I was in my previous job as an employment councillor, there were students that we actually were able to help with a little bit of funding; but, in the end, they had to turn down the seat that they had been offered at the College of the North Atlantic because the rent in Labrador City was just too high. They could not afford it, and they did not have supports around them that would enable them to go. So, that was very sad.

I hope, Mr. Speaker, that as we move away from loans into a needs-based, that some of those students will now be able to realize their dreams and go on and be able to help themselves. Because once you have an education, nobody can take that from you. When you leave high school, you are not prepared for the job market. You need to go out and you need to become skilled in a particular area, and then sometimes you need a little bit of assistance in getting into the labour market. That is what we need. We need more Newfoundlanders and Labradorians working in Newfoundland and Labrador.

I think it is wonderful that the Outlook 2020 is saying we are going to have all these job openings and we are going to need to bring some immigrants in to fill the positions, but our first responsibility has to be to the students, to the young men and women coming out of high school in Newfoundland and Labrador. They have to have the first chance at those jobs. By helping them obtain a solid education, that is what we are doing.

Mr. Speaker, the Liberal platform back in 2011 replied that it would commit to continuing to fund the tuition freeze. We saw the value in that. We saw the benefit. We saw the dividends that it would pay. Extending the tuition freeze would keep tuition fees here for university and college students the second lowest in Canada behind domestic tuition fee levels for Quebec residents.

Mr. Speaker, that makes our Province a very enticing Province to study in for post-secondary students. I know for a number of years I was involved with the med faculty over at Memorial University. It was amazing even how many international students were coming and applying

to study here because Memorial University has a sound reputation for good studies, and we have great tuition rates here.

I just want to say that between 2011 and 2013 more than 400,000 students borrowed money to help pay for more schooling. That is according to the Canadian Federation of Students. With this amendment to the Schools Act, I am delighted with the number of students we are going to be able to help.

In January 2014, the youth unemployment rate in the country was 13.9 per cent, according to Statistics Canada. In 2013, young people in the Atlantic Provinces and Ontario had the highest unemployment rate according to a report released by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Mr. Speaker, one of the ways to eliminate or try and reduce a high youth unemployment rate is through educating our youth and giving them that opportunity to go out, find employment, and support their own self. We know the amendment under the amendment to the Student Financial Assistance Act – AES we know is seeking an amendment to the Student Financial Assistance Act to develop regulations and policy to provide the authority for government to collect in Newfoundland and Labrador student grants that are deemed to be ineligible.

This is a very important amendment, Mr. Speaker, because we want the money to benefit the people who need it most. If the funding goes out to someone who might have dropped out or might have miscalculated the amount of funding in the pre-study period, then it is very, very important. The government has an onus and has a responsibility because it is the taxpayers' dollars. They have a responsibility to collect on student grants that are deemed ineligible.

Mr. Speaker, I would love to stand up and talk about an amendment to collect the outstanding debt in the fines department. I think it may be running up close to around \$38 million. Imagine what we could do for our students if we had some of those millions right now. Yet, sadly, we see some of those people who owe tens of thousands of dollars in fines are still out on the road driving around in their vehicles.

We need the amendment, Mr. Speaker, because currently students are eligible for up to \$140 a week provincial funding, \$80 in a grant, and \$60 in a loan. We know the loan will be dispersed the first day of class. That is a very positive thing because as I said earlier that is when most of the cost is incurred and the student is expected to pay out of pocket. With the full implementation, students eligible for up to \$140 a week provincial funding will now be \$140 grant and zero in loans. That is going to be a happy day when students start benefiting from that total grant that will be dispersed on the first day of class.

I am very pleased to speak for a few minutes to the act. I think it is a very positive thing. It would have been wonderful if it could have been implemented and brought in one phase. Instead, we know possibly there will be a little bit of confusion as this is phased in over two years. We will gauge that and see how it goes.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to point out for the purpose of the people listening what would be considered ineligible: an increase in or misreporting of the students pre-study and/or in-study resources. We know that would maybe not make them ineligible for the entire grant, but they would be ineligible for a portion of that. Of course, a student who would have a withdrawal from full-time studies or quit school, we know they would be ineligible.

How will the ineligible grants be recovered?
Mr. Speaker, we know there will be an adjustment to subsequent student financial assistance awards. They will be required to repay immediately. The repayment process would be similar to what is in place right now with the student loan.

Mr. Speaker, I am very happy; I will be supporting the amendment to Bill 16, An Act To Amend The Student Financial Assistance Act. I think those are the kind of things that we need to continue to do to support our students and do all we can to help them get the education and get started on the bright road to their future.

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.

I take great pleasure in being able to speak here for a few minutes on Bill 16, the amendment to the Student Financial Assistance Act. This is a piece of legislation that our party will be fully supporting, having looked at it and gotten a very good briefing from the departmental staff at the time. I have to say all accolades for this piece of legislation; it is a long time coming.

To the Canadian Federation of Students, when it comes to activism and pressing an issue, you succeeded, you worked hard to achieve this, so this victory is for the Canadian Federation of Students. I have to salute them in their activism on this matter.

It was also a cornerstone of NDP policy. Years ago, I think I can go back to the 1990s for that when the party at that particular time picked this particular charge and started speaking out on this issue. I think everybody has finally come onside with this, including the provincial government of today who brought in this piece of legislation we would have to say not a moment too soon. It is certainly great to see this piece of legislation coming through the House.

The amendment, of course, gives the government the authority to redefine that portion of post-secondary grants or student loans if the student drops out or has earned too much during pre- or in-study period to qualify for the amount initially granted; a couple of other things that go along with it.

Again, it is a very long time in coming. Student loans: I can speak about debt. We know that for a long time students in this Province have been flying away for better opportunities, knowing that they have a growing debt burden caused by probably part of the student loans. In some cases, you hear of students – and I have heard them many a time in regard to the amount of debt that they are carrying sometimes well in excess of that.

For me particularly, when I went back to school I had the choice, I guess you could say, of going the student loan way, and in the end chose a very

different way to do it. I had to take into consideration how serious I was to actually go out and get a student loan at that particular time, knowing that you were going to be taking a debt load on, knowing that you still had a family, for example, to look after, knowing that you were going to be taking a choice, a different career choice, if you will. Going back to school and considering debt was a very hard decision, and when you were trying to educate yourself or have your children educated, it is going to be –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I ask all members for their co-operation, please.

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker; it is a little bit distracting at times.

I have to say, when it comes to families having to take on the choice of carrying debt at the same time, even that is a detriment, sometimes, to even growing your economy. When I look upon this particular notion of having students not carrying a debt load, it is also about families not carrying a debt load, too. So this is a very important government initiative and another reason why we have been pushing this for so long, that families as well have to be able to given the freedom of movement – I will call it the freedom of movement – in making choices of what to be doing with their own families, and helping their own children be able to choose a career for the future as well. Not only to carry that family, or their own family, but to be able to have a participatory role and being able to achieve something great for our economy and for our Province, as well as for themselves. So this is about personal achievement as well, about being able to reach for that personal goal where a financial burden may have been a detriment to doing that.

That is the way that I look at that. Like I said, in my own personal experience at the same time, raising a family and having the choice of whether to take on that burden, that debt load, was something great in my mind at that particular time. I went back to school later on in life and did it my own way, type thing, and managed to make a better living for my family at the same time as well. So I hope that this is

going to be a positive initiative that people are going to be able to use to achieve their own goals at the same time.

The important point to remember when I was sitting down thinking about when I was being asked to speak to this piece of legislation, I thought about the line: Whoever owns your debt, owns you. The same goes for a country's economy as much as it does for your own personal economy too – because if you carry debt load it prevents you from being able to, in some cases, make freedom of choice here. So that is why I say that this is probably one of the more important initiatives here. This is an initiative, I think, that is going to be able to keep people home in the long run at the same time. I am very pleased to be able to get up and speak on this initiative today.

The other thing that I would like to be able to say about that and just to reinforce it, if you will, now that you are thinking, now that you are in a position where you probably do not have to deal with a big load of student debt, it might encourage more people to go back to school. That is a very pretty important component of this I think that some people are going to be able to live with and some people are going to be able to think about it a little bit more that it is never too late to go back to school. If you can say to yourself that perhaps I want to go back and do a different field of study, I am bored at the job that I am at now and I want to improve my own family's well-being, I want to achieve a better income, perhaps that goal would be there for somebody, like I said, to be able to go back and that barrier is taken out of the way. A financial barrier sometimes is a barrier to a person's own betterment at the same time. I wanted to reinforce that point.

When I was listening to the minister earlier talking about the small amount of people who may drop out of the program, when it comes to dealing with the student loan issue and talking about the recovery of some of that debt, one of the things that I was thinking about, sometimes students have difficulties in school that may be brought around by the death of family member, it could be personal medical issues that they could be dealing with; but another thing that I also ran into while I was working in the taxi industry, sometimes you run in to students, for

example, that go from one environment where they were into a smaller school system, for example, and they might run into the whole culture, what I would call the culture of Memorial University.

When you are talking about Memorial University, you are talking about pretty much a second city within the City of St. John's. Just to use the university as an example, you have upwards of about 17,000 students there at any one time, teachers and faculty keeping those buildings going. You are talking about some of our younger people simply cannot handle it and they are not used to that type of schooling, so sometimes they will drop out. Like I said, for the students that I talked to, I say to the minister, of all the students that I talked to most of the problems that were dealt with by the students back then are students that had problems in their first year of schooling. After that, it was much easier to go through university and everything. I would hope there would be a mechanism there for government to be able to look and see what is happening with students, and hopefully in those particular cases where there is probably counselling services there that students are going to be able to avail of. Hopefully in some cases some of the grants may be written off in those cases. Because sometimes you might think you are able to do something and you simply cannot, in spite of trying. Sometimes you have to move on and try different things.

Again, Mr. Speaker, just to sum up; like I said, a lot of the points have already been talked about. Congratulations to all of those students out there who fought for this. This is your day.

We will be supporting this piece of legislation. It is good to see government progressing with this. We wish those students of the future all the best in being able to make the choice to be able to go back to school.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

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

It is a privilege to get up here today and say a few words on the bill to amend the Student Financial Assistance Act. Any opportunity I have to get up and talk about our education system, I feel privileged to get up and speak about it because I am very proud to be part of this government that has done so much for education in this Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, when I look at the young people in Newfoundland and Labrador, all I have to do is look at my own two children who have both gone through education and seeing the opportunities that they have in front of them. Any young person in Newfoundland and Labrador today has opportunities like we have never seen before. It is a time in our Province when we have never been more successful, opportunities have never been greater, and our students are taking advantage of it.

Mr. Speaker, a lot of that has to do with the investments we have been doing in education for the last number of years. I had an opportunity a couple of times now to get up and speak on the Budget, and each time I did I just wanted to show where we are making our investments and things we are doing to make education affordable. That is what we are doing, basically, here on this bill today. Well, the bill today is basically about making sure there is something in place that if a student happens to be – if he has some kind of a reason why he has to stop his education and there is way to get back the grant or the loan that is out there for that student.

Mr. Speaker, I just look at the investment of what we are doing here today. I know hon. members on both sides got up, and as far as I understand everybody seems like they are in favour of this bill. It seems like it is a great piece of legislation. I think most people realize the savings that we are doing today are savings to our students. Savings to our students means they are going to have a brighter future. They are going to be investing back in our Province, staying here in our Province, and doing the work. It is a great opportunity to be a student in Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker.

This investment that we have done in the Budget with our post-secondary budget announcements was \$14.7 million over the next two years to eliminate the provincial student loans. Over the next five years, Mr. Speaker, that is going to be a \$50.6 million investment. That is a huge investment and investments we are doing.

I know the hon. Member for Port au Port stood up and gave us some figures, but I will just go back to what he said. It kind of really amazed me when I looked at it, Mr. Speaker, because he talked about the savings to students. He gave an example of a student from the College of the North Atlantic for a one-year program. The reduction in his payment is 42.1 per cent of what he is going to have to pay back. On an average, like a person who pays \$113 a month will go down to \$67 a month.

Mr. Speaker, no matter where you go in our Province and what student you talk to, they realize the investments that our government has made over the last number of years in them, in our students, in our young people, will pay off. It is going to pay off in the future. Our students are going to be the best educated, with the finest facilities. The opportunities that are out there today are second to none.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: Another example he just gave, too. A Memorial University student with a four-year undergrad program will benefit by having his or her student loan payments reduced by 44.4 per cent. Mr. Speaker, that is someone who is paying \$300 a month and it goes down to \$167 a month.

Mr. Speaker, never in our history have we done so much for students in Newfoundland and Labrador. I am very proud to be a part of this government that has been doing it since 2003.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, another figure just to show you, since 2005 our government has invested \$282 million in the freeze in tuition – \$282 million. That is \$280 million savings to the young people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, like I said, there are all kinds of different investments we have done over the years. I look at some of the investments when I look over at Memorial University – and every day I look over there you can see something new going up over there or some kind of infrastructure plan. I know there is a new residence over there now. I am not sure how many units are in that residence, but it is a pretty huge building.

I can only imagine the stress that is going to take off families. I know when you are a young person who comes in here; a young person comes to St. John's to go to MUN. I am sure the biggest concern to them and their parents are where are they going to stay? With a building like that and the number of people who can take advantage of that building there, the pressure and everything else that is off every family who has a student come in here.

It is a great opportunity for Newfoundland and Labrador. It is a great opportunity for our families. It is a great opportunity for all the young people coming in to get a great education. Again, Mr. Speaker, never in this Province's history has the opportunities been better for our young people. We are getting great education.

Obviously, you have to change. Not everybody is going to be a teacher. Like I said last night when I was doing my thing, most of the ones I am talking to lately, it all seems like they are doing engineering or they are doing something because they are looking at what is out there. They are looking at the big megaprojects. They are looking at what is in the future with oil and gas. They are looking at everything. They are looking at all the opportunities out there.

We know in the next number of years there is going to be a demand for young educated people in this Province. Mr. Speaker, again, the investments we are making – I look at our young Pages here today. I am sure they are all pleased with the investments we are making in education so they can have a great education. They can do what they want to do because that is the opportunity they get here today, in Newfoundland and Labrador, is to be able to decide what I am going to have as a future. The future for our young people is the brightest it has ever been.

Mr. Speaker, I heard the hon. Member for St. John's North mention, and he was positive about it, how they used to always line up into the Thompson Student Centre, I think he said it was. They were all trying to get their loans and it was weeks and everything else before – the way this works now is the first day in there, this grant is done. The loan is done to you, and you are off and running again. It is a time when the worry is over for the families. The worry is not there anymore that their loan is not gone through yet; they do not have a place to stay. This is what we are doing. We are taking away a lot of pressures put on families. That is what these investments are doing, like I said, millions and millions of dollars.

Mr. Speaker, I spoke to a gentleman from Nova Scotia and he told me his son was coming to MUN. I said: Oh, yeah. He said: Newfoundland should be really proud of what they have over there; it is one of the best facilities in all of Canada. I am sure there are people from all over Canada coming to Memorial University, the College of the North Atlantic, and the Marine Institute. It is because of the quality of the education, number one, because you do come for quality, but also the cost of our education.

Making it affordable for people to be able to come here, too, is very important. Who knows? They may stay and decide: Listen here, Newfoundland is a whole lot nicer than Nova Scotia. I am going to stay in that place. There are a whole lot of places there I would like to visit.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, again, the other figure that really surprised me on this – well, it did not surprise me, to tell you the truth. Do you know what? There are 7,000 students taking advantage of this, 7,000 students that we are helping out by assisting them and paying post-secondary education with the grants.

Mr. Speaker, this piece of legislation today is basically to enable us to be able to recover some of the money. If a person for some reason or another does not go on to his education and does get the grant, we need some mechanism to be able to get that money back so we can reinvest it

into other people who are looking for grants and loans. It is not to go out and just say: Listen, you are finished your education now and you owe us a slew of money. It may change. Something may change.

I know young people today, it is hard to decide when you come out of high school that decision. What am I going to do? You are seventeen years old and you are looking and figuring, what am I going to do? Sometimes they change their minds. Sometimes maybe Memorial University is not for me; maybe the Marine Institute is. They do decide after a couple of months. This is just putting in place a mechanism so we can say, okay, this is the regulation. There may be some part of this that is already spent, you are not going to recover, and here is what you spent it on, but there will be a process in place. That is all this amendment basically is doing today.

Mr. Speaker, like I said, I feel so strongly about education and I feel so strongly about the investments our government has made over the last number of years. I am sure our students are proud to be Newfoundlanders and Labradorians; I am sure they are proud their government is doing what they are doing. I know when an announcement was made from the loans to the grants I was watching a news clipping. I think it was on NTV or CBC, one of them. They were talking to students and they were just so delighted that here is another thing they are doing and here is something else we are doing. I am sure other parties on the other side recognize the value of our students; I am sure they recognize what our government is after doing, too, and investments in our students.

Not only have we invested in post-secondary, Mr. Speaker, but we started right from the level from where we gave free books. Our investment in making sure young people going up through – the pressure of books does not cause the parents to worry about the first day of school. We are doing the same thing with our post-secondary education with these investments.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to sit down now and just say that I think as a member for the great district and beautiful District of Cape St. Francis I am so proud of this government and the investments we have done in education, both in post-secondary and –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. K. PARSONS: It makes me proud every time to be able to get up here in this House of Assembly and talk about our young people because they are our future. Mr. Speaker, I know the young people of Newfoundland and Labrador appreciate the investments we have made in them because they are our future.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Littlejohn): The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At this time I move, seconded by the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services, that we adjourn debate on this bill.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved by the Government House Leader and seconded by the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services that we adjourn debate.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At this time I call a Concurrence Motion from the Order Paper, and we will do 2(b), the Resource Committee.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. BRAZIL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is an honour to stand in this House again this afternoon and talk about the discussions around the Resource Committee Estimates in dealing

with a number of very important departments and some very open discussion we had with our Committee members. First of all, I am just going to note who members of this Committee are: the Member for The Straits – White Bay North; Signal Hill – Quidi Vidi; Bonavista North; Lake Melville; Carbonear – Harbour Grace; Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune; and myself, Mr. Speaker.

Also, the Resource Committee, the departments we dealt with and had an open debate on the Estimates were the Department of Advanced Education and Skills; Fisheries and Aquaculture; Environment and Conservation; Tourism, Culture and Recreation; Natural Resources; and Innovation, Business and Rural Development. Mr. Speaker, we had a good collage there of very important departments who do a lot of social, a lot of business-oriented stuff, a lot of investment, a lot of our natural resource development, and a lot of our programs and services that are ecologically beneficial to the people in this Province.

We had a great debate over our sittings. Some of our sittings were daytime; some were nighttime. I had the privilege, Mr. Speaker, of chairing for the third time under the Estimates of the Resource Committee.

Just when I got elected a little over three years ago in a by-election, I came into my first sitting in the House and I remember the House Leader coming to me and saying: You are going to sit on the Resource Committee. I had no idea what that meant at the time, just as one of the Committee members. I remember sitting here trying to get an idea. I was fairly familiar with the Budget process, but I had never been intricately connected to the Estimates and the process that went on.

I can remember sitting in on a couple of sittings. I think one night we went six hours straight with Natural Resources and had a very open discussion about the start of Muskrat Falls and what it meant. I can remember the member for the Opposition at the time was continuously, for a number of hours, throwing out and trying to get away from the Estimates and the line estimate part of the process, continuously saying about doubling light bills. Well, we knew after all this process came and that was dispelled, that

was not factual. Then I got a better understanding of exactly what goes on in Estimates.

Then when I got an opportunity to Chair, I said, well, we are going to try to stick to exactly the intent of the Estimates. When we met with the line ministers – and I give credit to the Committee, I very much give credit to the Committee, for the last three years. While I understand they want to get into some policy, and that is relevant, I understand sometimes they want clarification. The ministers were very co-operative to say there was some leeway. We can go talk about policy, as long as we deal with the dollar figures that are there in the Estimates because that is what it is about, verifying that those dollars are in-line with exactly what programs are going to be offered, and explaining to the people, because this is what it is. It is the people's House.

The Opposition, the three parties, all have the ability to ask questions. They all have a responsibility to make sure the information out there is open to the general public, so a business, an individual citizen, or a not-for-profit organization would understand what programs are being offered, what kind of monies are being offered for that line, what the time frames are, and in principle some of the parameters around how you access that.

I give credit. There were some really good open discussions. Sometimes there was even some bantering back and forth on debate. At the end of the day, I found in my three years as Chair all parties were very respectful of the process and at the end of the day all got signed off. There was never having to sign off for the sake of saying we are closing debate. It did not work that way.

Sometimes you had to try to ask people to stick to the points and most people did that, if not all. I have to say, Mr. Speaker, it was one of the pleasant experiences of taking the lead when we banter back and forth between parties and we have different philosophies or different approaches to it. That worked very well. I found this year it worked equally well as we went through it.

I also want to thank some of the members here because everybody had very busy schedules

getting other people to fill in as we went through the process. I know the Member for Baie Verte – Springdale filled in on many times and actually came – I have to give credit to my colleague here – and sat in. He was very interested in knowing what was happening. He was very interested in knowing how that could benefit his part of the Province and his district, and a better understanding. When there is a discussion with a minister or when the Opposition are making points, he would have a clear understanding of whether or not there are some merits to what they are saying there.

Also the Member for Kilbride who filled in on a number of occasions, I appreciate that, and my colleague from Port au Port. There are a number of people who filled in.

AN HON. MEMBER: Teamwork.

MR. BRAZIL: It was teamwork across the board. When people filled in they understood the process. It happened that members on the opposite side also filled in for each other. It shows how we look and the all-party process works. In this case it worked very efficiently and people got the information they needed.

It was recorded. The general public has access to it. There is nothing hidden here. It is explained. Sometimes there was probably more detailed information that was needed. Ministers agreed: ask the questions, send the request, and the information will be shared. That process is happening now.

Ministers are gone back to their line departments and asking: Can you look up what is happening in this; or can you get us a list of exactly what grants were funded, to what organizations, and what some of the impacts were? That is information that was shared. Regardless of who asked it, it is going to be shared with all Committee members. I saw that as a very positive thing as we went through.

As I noted, you really look at the departments that we discussed here. Advanced Education and Skills is perhaps the most broad-range department we have in this government right now when you look at the social programs, the employment programs, some of the supportive mechanisms we have there, some of the youth

initiatives we have, particularly around some of the new creative initiatives we have, and some of the issues around persons with disabilities and housing. There are a number of things there that actually made it so there was never going to be a dull moment. As you went through one heading and passed that, there was going to be some good discussion, but you could see the flow, and the flow in this department was about how we improve the stake people have in this Province, how we improve their role in life, how we make sure that we give them supports to move forward. There were very positive things and I am very happy to be part of that open discussion and we moved it forward.

Fisheries and Aquaculture, another great department there; we had some real good debate around where we are and some of the challenges that we have in the fishing industry, some of the challenges that we have because we do not get to control things that we want to control.

The aquaculture industry, how we see how that is moving forward. Even when every now and then we hit a little glitch in the road, how things are very positive and we have invested in the right way so that people can diversify how our economy moves forward and how that industry itself can grow. We have done that very positively as we went through.

We talked about even the impact that the CETA agreement would have. There was some open dialogue, I give credit – the minister was not holding anything back. He explained where this would go. He explained what the vision was for down the road. He explained what some of the challenges may be from a federal-provincial agreement. There was good open discussion about how this could be seen as a positive thing. I did not see a lot of negativity from the Opposition when they were coming back, particularly after things were explained. So these were all positive things that went there.

We look at Environment and Conservation, all the things that we are doing here: the things that we are very aware of that have to be done in our environment; how things are changed in our industries; how we are making sure that people are aware of what we have to offer, the supports. This is not just about: We give you money or you give us money in return for payments. This

is about: We support each other, how we develop partnerships. In these cases, particularly around Environment and Conservation, how we do that. How everybody understands their role, their responsibility and some of the privileges they have in dealing with the ecology we have in this Province, the beautiful landscape that we have. That was a very positive discussion there.

Tourism, Culture and Recreation: It is perhaps the most uplifting department that you can get in because everything is in a positive mode. There are always things moving forward. Our industries are there as part of this whole process.

The tourism industry is a booming industry, something that we took as an infant and now made it into a very stellar adult and we are moving that forward. We are leading the country in everything, not only our ads but in particular how we draw people and the type of entertainment that we have for people, the type of exposure they have to our culture and how we have spread the culture from Nain, Labrador to Carbonear to the West Coast to the Burin Peninsula to Burgeo. All these things that we are trying to say, this is not just based on one particular geographic area. It is not based on one particular demographic when it comes to what political party or what your representative is, the political stripe they have. This is about: We have resources, we have something we can sell to people, and we put it out there and put it out there very eloquently and put it out there very professionally. We are very proud of that.

We talked about our recreation, how we have improved our recreation facilities in this Province. They are second to none. In the last ten years we have given our athletes, competitive athletes or recreation or social athletes, the ability to be better engaged. They have healthier lives. Communities feel pride about what they have in facilities there, and being able to engage their own local teams and their own local communities, very much so.

Natural Resources, Mr. Speaker, as you know, we have moved things forward in the last number of years. We are trying to diversify our economy through our mineral investments, through some of the new things we are doing in the mining industry, what we are doing in the

natural gas industry, what we are doing in the oil industry, but particularly what we are trying to do in clean energy and what we are doing with Muskrat Falls.

We were criticized yesterday. Somebody spoke up in one of the Opposition parties and said we are spending \$7 billion in Muskrat Falls. Yes, we are. You are right, we are. We are investing \$7 billion so that not only do we have clean energy, but we also have future revenue. We also take care of the next generation, the existing generation, and future generations. It puts us on a global market.

What was neglected to say we have also spent, in that same period of time that we are going to spend \$7 billion, \$25 billion in social programs for the people of this Province, in investments in infrastructure, making sure that people have proper health care, that people have proper education, and that young people have an ability to broaden their horizons, to know more about careers, to be able to expose themselves to what is going on in the world, and in turn bring people to this Province for investment purposes, but also bring them here because of the cultural benefits we offer to people. There are all kinds of things going on there.

We have heard the minister talk about how we are moving some of these positive things forward and how we are using our partnerships with other provinces and with international companies to make sure the benefits to the people of this Province are second to none and that they are long term. We are diversifying who we are and what we do.

There was a great open discussion about what we invest. A lot of the programs and services we do are partnership related. I thought that was very innovative. It is not just about: Here is some money, now go do your job, we will look at it, and tell you whether or not we like it. This is about: We have a stake in this. The more partners you can bring to the table, the more successful we know it is going to be and the more beneficial it is going to be to the people involved because more stakeholders have an input into what is happening here. That seemed to be a very positive approach.

I did not see any negativity. That is the one thing I found here. When the people were enlightened or it was explained to them, even if they did not totally agree with the amount of money we put into it or the approach we are using, they did understand the benefit behind the approach we were going with. People understood the best way to do things is with partnerships. I would hope whatever Administration we are in would accept that process. We have been very successful with that and there is no doubt we will continue to do that.

We looked at Innovation, Business and Rural Development, again, one of those stellar departments that give a leg up for people. It invites people to come in and say: Look, you have some creative ways of doing things. We want to develop some partnerships. You want to bring something here that normally is not a standard of what we do, but it can benefit the people here, be it through a service, through an investment, through creating employment, through a different product, or through a different type of service we need. We want to bring you in. Come on, you are engaged. Let us come in and talk. We will help you get to the next stage.

If you come in with an idea and may not have the expertise to develop the business plan, may not have the expertise to bring in proper consultants, may not have the expertise to be able to put the time frames in place we have that, we have that expertise to work with. If it is a viable business, we will support you wherever we can. We will try to open markets. We will try to open the partnerships that need to be developed. We have been very successful in being able to do that.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say that six line departments are only a small example of what we do as an Administration and what the other line departments do. We have been very happy to have that process to go through what has been done.

I might note, too, outside of all of this that we talked about, the monies that we spend – and fair enough, we have an \$8 billion budget; money goes out. We are answerable for where the money goes. We want to guide it in the right direction. We outline programs and services,

and it should be noted, programs and services that we outline are driven by the front-line people; they are driven by our civil servants. The civil servants' information is coming from those users, coming from the clients, coming from the customers. They are the people who have said over the course of a year: We need a program that addresses this issue, or we need supports in this area, or we would like to partner on this particular endeavour. This is where the things come from.

People think we sit as politicians in here – and I would like to be able to say we all know a little bit about everything, but that is not the way it works. We all know a little bit about a number of things and probably we know a lot about some things, but we need the people that we have around us. Our civil servants are second to none. They are very able to be able to develop programs and services that will encourage us to move things forward.

What they have, Mr. Speaker, is the front-line connection with the people in this Province, the innovators, the creators, those people who are out in the field who may have limited education, limited experience, but do know what is needed. When they pass on that information, when they pass it on to the civil servants who then analyse where it fits, when they put it together and they come up with a structure and then come to a line senior executive, then come to ministers, then come to Cabinet, then we get our programs that are reflected in our budget lines, and reflected on the amount of money that we should be investing in particular lines.

We have to have a good balance here, we have to have a social conscience, we have to have an economic investment, but we also have to be prudent on where our money goes. We need to be able to make enough money back to be able to not only sustain that, but improve it.

There is no doubt there are going to be issues, there are going to be new programs, and there are going to be things that we develop that we want to build on. We need to be able to have that ability to grow things. That is where we have gone; we have gone from budgets of \$3.5 billion. I sat in this House thirty-two years ago when John Collins was the Minister of Finance and watched him put out his budget; \$2.1 billion

and that considered an extreme amount of money, debt ridden and everything else.

What we have done now is diversified where our revenue streams come from, made it work so that we have also addressed that we are no longer behind in our infrastructure needs now and that we are catching up. Do we still have a ways to go? Sure, we do. Has each line department started addressing some of those? Sure, they have and we continue to do that, and we will continue to do that, Mr. Speaker.

I want to note, too, that as we go through this process the line departments that we had discussed here generate nearly \$2 billion in revenue through their partnerships and investment, particularly around natural resources and those areas. Some of the other areas where people are acquiring land, there are permit's fees. There are support fees and these types of things.

So, not only do we spend money, and we are responsible for that, but we also generate money and we are responsible for where that money goes. We are also responsible for how we make sure each department has the ability to generate. Some departments generate money which gets put into programs, other departments solely spend money because they are social oriented or they are support oriented. That is how a good economy works. It has good fiscal management and it is how things move forward.

I also want to note a few things we had talked about yesterday. Particularly, I am going to pick the Department of Advanced Education and Skills. As I mentioned at the onset, that is a department that is vast; very vast for a number of reasons. One is the people it serves, and the backgrounds they may have and the demographics and this type of thing, but also the fact that it is perhaps our most socially conscious one.

Health is a generic. We understand that. Health is everybody's concern. When we deal with AES, there are a number of things there that we have to look at: housing issues, Income Support, persons with disabilities, mobility issues, all kinds of relevant things there. Even young men and women who are in the trades needing that first leg, needing to get from apprenticeship to

journeyperson, being able to get that first job. Being able to have confidence that they can now contribute back, because they do not have to move out of this Province and they have a skillset here they can use.

I want to note some of the things we were criticized for yesterday by one of the Opposition members here. It was around Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege a number of years ago of working with Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. I know at the time we had challenges because there were limited funds, but we took that money and made sure it represented the particular needs of our clientele group there – our particular clientele group.

I am just going to note a number of the things we now have that we offer when it comes to affordable housing; investments in standard housing, how we subsidize part of the housing. Do we need to go further? Sure we do. We talk about it in caucus, our colleagues talk about it. We talk about it with the cities. We talk about it with the agencies and organizations. We need to be able to improve on it, but here is where we have come, Mr. Speaker.

This goes to prove how we are committed to the social programs here, particularly around the housing things. Some of the rental housing programs, \$9 million a year just for the Rent Supplement Program. That is a lot we put out there for people so we can make it easier for people to be able to find affordable housing.

Do we have challenges in the Northeast Avalon? Yes. The economy has been so robust that things have boomed, probably even beyond our expectations. Now we have to find a happy medium. How do we get back so people can still afford a decent apartment or house in this area on a fixed income or on a low-income? We need to do that.

Those people who have some special needs, we need to find ways of being able to do that. We have done that. We have found ways where people could have older homes, yet make them energy efficient by improving the aesthetics of that, by investing in some of our home modification repair ones, particularly around those people who have mobility issues. We

have done that, \$8 million a year. It is a major investment there.

There is great uptake. There is not one client who gets it who does not say it has changed their life. I have seen a number of my constituents who have done it, speak very highly of it, very proud of what they have done. It has made their lives a little bit more convenient and much more accessible.

Residential Energy Efficiency Program, REEP, is \$4 million. Not only are we trying to get green energy but we are also trying to lead by example in green energy, get everybody else to be able to say if you can save money and help the environment, it is a win-win for everybody. People then would have that extra disposable income to put into whatever else that drives them in their life, whatever makes them comfortable as they move forward.

Investment in affordable housing, \$68 million we have invested in the last number of years, \$28 million this year alone. This is a year where we are going to do some extra call for not-for-profits here to look at affordable housing. Another part of programs that we developed was that we develop partnerships with the industry out there. The industry knows how to drive this. We know what it is we need. The industry knows how to put it there. The clients have told us what it is that is going to make their lives a little bit more convenient, what it is they need to be able to get that extra supports to be able to take control of their lives. We have been very happy to be able to do that.

The Provincial Homelessness Fund, Mr. Speaker, \$1 million, something – because Newfoundland, I give credit. Thank God of our family supports, that over the years people have had that extra bit. There are couch surfers no doubt, and there is no doubt people still have to rely and live on the streets. We are trying to change that with our partnerships with a number of agencies here; the homeless association, Choices for Youth. A number of these organizations have managed to partner with us and in turn we have partnered with them, and in turn partnered with the private sector and the federal government. We have managed to make, at this point, over \$20 million worth of

investments between the partnerships in the last four years in this Province, Mr. Speaker.

We have done a lot of really positive things. That is just in one little entity, in one little part of one department. These are major investments we have made to improve people's lives. Is there room for improvement? Yes, without a doubt. Do we discuss it every day? Do departments look at modifying? Do ministers talk to their executive? Do the executive talk to the front line staff? Does the front line staff talk to the partners? Sure they do. The one intention, Mr. Speaker, is to improve the lives of the people of this Province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. LANE: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a pleasure to have an opportunity to speak in this House once again today on the Budget and the concurrence motion.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to take a little different approach today. The last couple of times I spoke about the school situation in Mount Pearl, which is a very important issue. Hopefully, I get some time towards the end of my twenty minutes; I am certainly going to go back there.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk a little about the housing situation and the widening gap between those who have and those who have not. I was prompted to do so, Mr. Speaker, by a resident of my district, a constituent. I had a long chat with her yesterday about her particular situation, and her situation as it relates to housing, her situation as it relates to her ability to pay the rent, her ability to keep the heat, keep the lights on, pay her phone bill, and have enough food in her cupboards to sustain herself.

This is a person who worked for many years, but unfortunately never worked in a situation where she had a government pension. Although it was an agency doing work for the government, but it did not qualify her for any benefits – which is what we see quite often when it comes to people

who are working in home care, people looking after the elderly, disabled, and so on. Quite often government utilizes agencies and so on. While the funding is ultimately coming from the public purse, the people who are taking care of our most vulnerable, these people are simply not getting compensated very well in many cases, and they are not receiving benefits.

This particular person, and in her particular situation, ended up taking ill, came down with a serious illness. She had so many weeks of I guess it was sick leave unemployment, whatever the case might be. Once that ran out, she found herself in a very difficult situation trying to live with very little income coming in through the door, and actually had to revert to the Provincial Income Support system.

Of course, when we look at the amount of money people are receiving in Income Support, and then you factor that in with the price of housing, the price for an apartment and so on, this particular lady has been living in this residence for a number of years and she has steadily seen her rent increase, because with the housing market, as we have heard people talk about here in the past – with that housing market, with the boom, we will call it for lack of a better term. The boom depends on who you talk to. Some people are experiencing the boom. Some people in this part of the Province are experiencing it. Certainly, people who are living in the Long Harbour area and so on, the Clarendville area who are working at Bull Arm, Long Harbour, and all those places, those people are benefitting.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible) in Glovertown.

MR. LANE: I heard somebody say Glovertown, and good for them. If that is happening in Glovertown, I am glad to hear it.

The bottom line is sometimes being in that area where the boom is felt is actually a negative thing for somebody who is on a low income, somebody who is on a fixed income, and so on. This is the situation this particular lady finds herself in, where rent has gone through the roof because of the high rental rates as a result of this boom in St. John's, Mount Pearl, and we will

say the Northeast Avalon area, and finding it extremely difficult, almost impossible, to live.

Mr. Speaker, we hear of these stories all the time, and this is not the first person I have been contacted by in my district who is experiencing this problem. I have had a number of others. Now, granted, I am fortunate, I suppose, in the sense that perhaps my district, if you were to look at it statistically and in terms of the number of concerns brought to me in my district as compared to perhaps the Member for St. John's South, the Member for St. John's Centre, and the Member for St. John's North, I would suggest the volume is much higher. In those particular districts, there are more people who are living in the inner-city areas, a lot of people on fixed incomes, a lot of people in social housing, and so on, and they are all experiencing these challenges. I do get some nonetheless.

This particular lady called me and said: Paul, I want you to speak out on my behalf as my MHA, as someone in your district who is experiencing this. So I said to that lady, that particular constituent: Absolutely I will. I said I have been preoccupied, no doubt, lately with the school situation in Mount Pearl, the disastrous situation in terms of the schools in Mount Pearl, but I am going to speak out on this issue for you and I will continue to be mindful of it and speak out about it more and more, which I intend to do.

Mr. Speaker, quite often we hear the government members talking about all the money they are spending on this, that, and everything else. They will talk the millions of dollars in social housing and millions of dollars in education or whatever. If the number is not high enough in any given year, then they will say, well, over the last five years we have put whatever, so then it makes a big number, an inflated number, over the last ten years or whatever. Again, it inflates the numbers to give this impression of all of the money that is going in.

I am not disputing, and nobody over on this side of the House of Assembly, certainly my colleague here from St. John's South, would ever dispute the fact that government is investing in social housing and we would never dispute the fact that there have been some good programs brought forth by the government,

programs we all support. I am sure members over there support it, members over here support it, the Official Opposition, and I am sure members of the Third Party support it as well.

We talk about programs like the residential energy repair program, a program that allows individuals on the lower income levels to be able to, in many cases, retrofit their homes with perhaps windows, properly sealed windows, doors, and so on. In many cases, that is what comes from it to keep the heat in and lower their heat bills. Everybody over here on this side of the House would applaud that. We agree with it.

We talk about the residential Home Repair Program, again, another good program. Nobody on this side of the House would ever dispute that it is a good program. There is no doubt it targets people, again, on the lower income scale and it allows them to get some much-needed repairs to their home. We would certainly applaud that.

We have another program whereby people with mobility challenges, disabilities and so on – I forget the exact name of the program, but again, that is another one administered through Newfoundland and Labrador Housing where people can perhaps get a ramp put in; perhaps they can get one of those bathtubs that you can just open a door and walk into, grab bars, and all that kind of stuff to retrofit their home for people who have medical issues, mobility issues, and so on – disabilities. Nobody over on this side of the House would dispute that. That is a good program.

That being said, though, when we talk about pure numbers, we talk about budgetary numbers and the amount we have put in over the last year, the last five years, ten years, or whatever. That all sounds wonderful, it does, and if we are giving increases that is a positive thing as well, but talking about numbers and talking about increases in budgets does nothing for the person who is left behind because there is not enough money to go around. It does nothing.

It is great for the person who qualifies for the residential energy repair program this year. It is great for the person who qualifies for the Home Repair Program. It is great for the person who receives a unit from Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. It is great for the person who

receives a rent supplement from Newfoundland and Labrador Housing, but the problem we have is not everybody who needs it, and legitimately needs it, gets it – not everybody who legitimately needs it gets it.

What happens to those people? Many of those people are people who have disabilities. Many of those people are senior citizens. I think when you look at our status as a have Province, and I understand that is just a calculation they use in Ottawa to determine whether we receive transfer payments and so on, but nonetheless we are a have Province. We are supposed to be paying our own way and looking after our people.

When we hear about senior citizens who in the wintertime have to go to the Avalon Mall or they have to go to the Village Mall to stay warm because they cannot afford to keep the heat on in their home, then I believe collectively we are failing people when that is happening. When we have people going to the food banks on a regular basis, and we are seeing an increase in my understanding in use at the food banks, when that is happening in our current situation with the oil royalties and everything else, then we are failing the people.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I will be the first to admit, and I said it when I was on the other side of the House of Assembly and I will maintain it, all the decisions we make in this House of Assembly need to focus on the taxpayer, the ordinary person who gets up every day, gets themselves to work, they work for a living, and they work hard.

In many cases, people in my district, I am sure most districts – certainly I can speak to mine – many of the homes there are two people working. The husband and the wife, or the partner, are both working and paying taxes. All they do is they work, they get home, they look after the kids, they go to bed, they get up the next day and they work, and so on. They try to eke out a living and pay their bills, have a home, have a vehicle, keep their kids fed, in school, maybe in some kind of a sport, and maybe even a little vacation every now and then. There is nothing wrong with that.

While they are doing all this, they are paying taxes, and it is their money that we are spending

in this House of Assembly. We can never lose focus on that, and that is why sometimes when I hear members talking about oh, you know, giving themselves a pat on the back because we invested \$10 million here, and \$20 million here, and \$100 million there –

MR. FORSEY: It is more than that.

MR. LANE: The member across the way is saying “more than that”, and good for you – but it is the people’s money that you are spending. Let us not kid ourselves, we are not writing personal cheques. These are not personal cheques, this is the people’s money, these are taxes that hard-working Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are paying, and we are just simply spending that money, and we are choosing how that money gets spent. So then it comes down to priorities.

Mr. Speaker, when we are spending the people’s money –

MR. FORSEY: (Inaudible) kilometres to drive to spend any of the money.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl South.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would say to the Member for –

MR. FORSEY: Exploits.

MR. LANE: – Exploits that he will certainly have his opportunity to speak, and I would challenge him to get up on his feet and speak, as I am doing, without speaking notes written for him, actually use his own mind, his mouth, and speak his own words. I challenge him to do it. He should try it sometime; he might like it. Cut the puppet strings and give it a try.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, as I was saying –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. LANE: As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, or trying to say before I was so rudely interrupted once again, as normal practice, people have to pay for all this. When people are paying for this stuff out of their tax dollars, I think people, when they are doing it they want us to prioritize for them how we spend that money.

Mr. Speaker, I really do not believe the people, in terms of prioritizing that, would have any issue whatsoever around us actually putting additional money and putting it into things like social housing. I do not think they would have any issue with us putting that into more residential energy repair programs. I do not think they would have an issue putting it into dental care. I do not think they would have an issue into even raising the threshold to some degree.

We have a lot of people, Mr. Speaker, who are on fixed incomes. Those particular people, because they may be \$100 or a couple of hundred dollars over a very low threshold, they do not qualify for any programs. I have a number of people in my district who have come to me with that issue as well, where they make just enough that they are just barely over that threshold. Because they are over that threshold, guess what? They do not qualify for anything.

The only thing they qualify for is for paying taxes, but they do not qualify for residential energy home repair. They do not qualify for the provincial home repair. They do not get any of the Home Heating Rebates or any of these other programs. They do not qualify for any of it, Mr. Speaker – none of it.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that is an issue for those people. I think as a collective group here we should be working on improving their station in life. I would challenge members on the other side to stand up and say what I am saying here in this House of Assembly is a bad thing and that what I am saying here is wrong. They know it is not wrong because I am sure they have people in their districts, like I have people in my district, who have the same challenges on trying to get by day by day on the government programs which are currently available to them. I think we should be working towards improving their lot in life as well so that those people do not fall between the cracks.

As we see our economy growing, as we see more development, as we see bigger booms occurring, then what we are seeing is that gap between those who have and those who have not, we are seeing an increase. That is what we are seeing, Mr. Speaker. We have to be working together to try to narrow that gap for those people. I think that is a laudable goal for all of us. It is a laudable goal for all of us to do that.

It is interesting that, again, you hear members over there making light of it, laughing at it; they think it is a joke. Maybe they think it is funny that we would want to tell help people on low income, to help senior citizens, to help people with disabilities. I do not think it is a joke, my colleagues do not, and we will fight for those people, despite those members across the way.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bonavista North.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CROSS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is indeed a great opportunity to stand up and try to bring some sense to the debate this afternoon. We are now speaking in Concurrence debate. I guess for the audience who is watching now, who just tuned in, who did not see the changeover when we changed to this debate about forty minutes ago, right now we are talking about the meetings that were held by various committees that met.

They are broken into three different categories: the resource sector, social sector and government services sector. Each of these groups met to question officials from the various departments in government and the ministers on expenditures in budget line items in this year's Budget.

As we devoted that time to drill down into how the department was spending their money, most of this time was allocated to members of the Opposition so they could gather a greater understanding, I guess, of how the money was

being spent and questioned certain amounts that went here and there.

Like the Member for Kilbride last night, he got up and spoke about something that is not normally talked about; he brought a different story to the House of Assembly. I am sort of motivated today that I am going to wander slightly from this. I am going to stick within my Resource Committee Estimates meetings, but rather than talking about the line items and some of these things and the expenditures and just throw out all statistics and dollars that are spent, what I am going to talk about are the six different portfolios that fall within the resource sector and talk about the services that are provided to this Province through these departments and put a different flesh on the bones of what we are doing.

I am going to share what the mandates are for each of these departments and talk about how in some of these departments we are constantly just spending money to develop further investments in the Province; but, in other cases, as was already mentioned by the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island, the Chair of this Committee, some departments are actually revenue-generating departments and they actually bring money as well into the coffers of our Province.

On top of just coming to sittings here in the House of Assembly on the Budget debate, this Resource Committee met six times, for three hours each, and we allowed members on the Committee to question. There was a total of approximately eighteen hours of questioning on the expenditures and the programs. In lots of cases, the members came in and they talked about policy and they tried to get into inside the heads of the ministers in different ways. That was a sharing of the concept, I guess, of why and how the money is being spent, not just exactly what it is being spent for.

The resource sector, Mr. Speaker, includes as the Chair said, Advanced Education and Skills; Environment and Conservation; Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture; Innovation, Business and Rural Development; Natural Resources; and Tourism, Culture and Recreation. These are the six resource sector portfolios. These are the

departments of government that are covered in this resource sector.

The total budget for the resource sector is approximately \$1.8 billion in 2014. That is one billion, 800 million dollars, as well as some other odd cents, but \$1.8 billion. That is 22 per cent of the provincial Budget, Mr. Speaker.

What I want to do in the next few minutes I am going to take – and these are my own notes drawn from some of the Estimates booklets and some of the other things on the different Web sites of government. I want to share, I want to educate, and I want maybe to bring some of the services of each of these six departments to the populous through our media today.

I am sure most of the members in this House of Assembly all understand every single service of every single department and we do not need this for all of us in here. Maybe there are some of us, Mr. Speaker, who might not understand all of these services and then we can offer a better service to our constituents by taking in this sort of lesson today.

Advanced Education and Skills is where I would like to start, Mr. Speaker. In Advanced Education and Skills the total budget for both current and capital is \$900 million. That is 0.9 of \$1 billion. That is about half of the resource sector spending is going in Advanced Education and Skills. What most people do not realize is that this is a very, very vast department of government. This is a very, very huge portfolio. It has a mandate to ensure that the Province has highly-educated post-secondary graduates and skilled workers. That is one of its main mandates.

That is a mouthful in itself, Mr. Speaker, to really try to size it all up. This portfolio ensures that the Province has highly-educated post-secondary graduates who will become the skilled workers for all of these positions. We have been talking for the last two or three years about the 70,000 jobs that are going to be created in the skilled sector. Of all these jobs, if we are going to be poised to take advantage of all this great development that this Province has to offer, then we have to have employees with these skills.

No one can tell me, Mr. Speaker – no one – on either side of this House that we do not have the people resources in this Province to be able to man most of these jobs. What we are not able to handle obviously we have to import. For the most part, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians should be able and are able and are capable of handling these skills, these jobs.

We have proven it in developments and other parts of the world some of the greatest workers out there are the Newfoundlanders and Labradorians who go out there. People are thrilled to have Newfoundlanders and Labradorians on their teams. Mr. Speaker, what we really need is to bring back these Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to help develop our own Province and to show we can be the leaders in our own Province.

The host of services, as I was getting ready to talk about, in Advanced Education and Skills – and once I pay attention to the clock, I might run out before I get to the end of Advanced Education and Skills and not talk about all six, but I will have another opportunity to stand up, Mr. Speaker. The host of services – and I tried to create a list, and I am going to expound on a couple of these, but for the expediency of time I want to refer to my list I have created.

The service there that we help employers in accessing and keeping the skilled employees, and I have just talked about that a little bit, but we are also through Advanced Education and Skills going to support delivery of post-secondary education through our public colleges, through Memorial University and College of the North Atlantic, but also through the private colleges. Mr. Speaker, we can see the change of how we are now developing, redeveloping, and redefining courses. Certain courses are in the syllabi of these educational institutions and some are being taken out.

We are looking at the enrollments in some of these, Mr. Speaker, and seeing when the enrollments are very low and we are spending a lot of money to furnish a course that no one seems to want, then we need to pull that out and be able to be flexible enough to retrain some of our instructors or the instructors be flexible enough to move into other course areas. Where they are not, then they may have the option of

going into the private colleges and teaching there, where some of these courses might rightfully fall to be delivered.

Another mandate for this department, Mr. Speaker, is the administration of student aid. We have talked about that. The bill that was on the floor here today was talking about the changeover from student loans to up-front grants. We are putting legislation in place to make that happen. Some of the expenditure in this Budget and next year's Budget is going to help do just that, help put in place something that will be the envy of every other province in this country whereby we are helping our students, helping with the training of our students, and motivating our students to want to further their post-secondary education by allowing them to have the share that comes from this Province be a grant rather than a loan. That is something that makes us the envy of the country.

We are also providing support through this department, Mr. Speaker, for apprentices, trade certifications, and career development. I can remember attending sessions last year on the Journeyperson Mentorship Program, a very, very fine program that is governed by this department that allows for companies to hire a journeyperson, such that they can train their apprentices and have someone on staff that their main purpose is to train the apprentices. It really gives a big advantage to contracting companies, to corporations who wish to take advantage of that program.

Mr. Speaker, this department is not just involved in the advanced education or the skills; it is also involved in Income Support. In the Budget this year there was an increase – and I agree with some of the speakers on the opposite side of this House, that when you do have major improvements in your employability for a lot of the sectors in your communities, there develops a gap. Those who are not prepared for these positions, those who do not fit into the economic boom, there will be a gap. We have to support these, the lesser and more vulnerable, and the lesser privileged in our society. Whether they are there by no fault of their own, or they are there because of some form of physical or mental condition.

Again, we have a very robust Income Support system. This year we gave a 5 per cent increase, which is more than we gave to our employees. We will also consider in the future years trying to maintain and lessen the gap between these individuals and those who are active in our communities.

This department is also responsible for assisting communities and regions during disasters and catastrophes. Mr. Speaker, we remember the fire in St. John's not so long ago, and how members from this department came to the aid of the residents in a seniors' complex when there was a fire. We also remember how this department was activated instantly and visited the western portion of Labrador, in Wabush, when the mine was closing down and was going to shut down for a while.

This department is also leading in our Poverty Reduction Strategy. In the last six or seven years we have maintained an investment of almost \$200 million a year, around \$170 million a year, Mr. Speaker. We have gone over \$1 billion in six or seven years in our Poverty Reduction Strategy, which is again the envy of the country.

This department is also in charge of the Adult Literacy Program, Mr. Speaker. That might be late on the list, but it is a very important aspect of this. I spoke in a member's statement just recently about an individual who really became a success later in life. His education started very late in life, and he became a columnist for the local newspaper. This guy is Bobby Tulk – Bobby, we call him, in New-Wes-Valley. He had the unfortunate problem, he had a hearing problem. As he grew, he did not really fit into the education program but he did have an opportunity later in life. There are many other Robert Tulks, I guess, who have that ability, and this department is the one that looks out to that.

It also includes the portion of this government that looks out for and pays attention to persons with disabilities. It also takes care of immigrants and multiculturalism. So this Advanced Education and Skills department, Mr. Speaker, is humongous, and it is something we spent a lot of time talking about in our Estimates committees.

The second-most costly department of the Resource Committee was Natural Resources. Of course, the head of the Committee was the Resource Committee. I will try to run through the other departments rather quickly.

Mr. Speaker, we have expenditure in Natural Resources of \$650 million. A fair bit of that is a capital investment for future development in our Province. The diversification of our economy, the biggest single area that is going to diversify our income in the next few years is our equity investment in Muskrat Falls.

The four main areas of Natural Resources would be Forest Management, Agrifoods Development, Mineral Resource Management, and Energy Resource and Industrial Benefits Management. Now, I am saying these rather quickly, but this has become the most popular department of our government. People know most of this one inside-out, Mr. Speaker.

Tourism, Culture and Recreation is another department that is under new management with our new minister taking over just recently. The total expenditures in Tourism, Culture and Recreation is around \$66 million, Mr. Speaker. The mandate there is to support economic growth and employment in tourism, arts, heritage, recreation, sport, and active living.

The establishment and operation of historic sites is a part of the Tourism, Culture and Recreation mandate. Visitor information centres, recreational facilities around our Province, archeological sites, we regulate them. It includes artifacts and the documents in our museums and places, Mr. Speaker, and also the arts and heritage sector of our development.

Our expenditure in Tourism, Culture and Recreation is about \$66 million, but, Mr. Speaker, that department is a \$1 billion a year industry for Newfoundland and Labrador. It is very, very vital that we regulate the mandate to cover all of these areas so that all the operations in our Province will be successful and competitive. Our supports through marketing and our tourism strategies have been the envy of the country. We know that shall continue. We are still supporting that department through this year's Budget.

Environment and Conservation, Mr. Speaker, has \$40 million expenditures in the Budget, but no small task because it is the head of the protection and enhancement of our environment. About biodiversity, it covers the protection of our endangered species. It covers wildlife. It covers inland fish and waterways, and water change climate. It also takes care of all the efforts of our Province in pollution in air, water, and soil. Develop our water resource management, environmental impact assessments, industrial emissions and discharges, pesticides, hazardous materials, storage, use, transportation and disposal. All of these areas, Mr. Speaker, are very, very important.

Fisheries and Aquaculture, Mr. Speaker, a \$20 million cost for capital and current in our Budget, but so important to our society to who we are, what we are, how long we have been here, and how long we wish to remain here. It is pretty well a \$1 billion industry yearly from the resources that we draw in by our harvesters and our processors. This is in charge of culturing, harvesting, processing, and the marketing. A very big arm of this department now, Mr. Speaker, with a lot of support is the aquaculture industry. We are very, very strong in that and our expenditures are very successful.

I am going to run out of time before I get into Innovation, Business and Rural Development, but I am going to have more time, Mr. Speaker, on the main Budget debate, so I am hoping to probably carry on the lecture for 'Mr. Public,' but also for all of us here who really want to understand it is not just dollars and cents; it is sense. Most of these concepts are very important to this whole Province in its totality.

I thank you very much for your indulgence.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Bay of Islands on a point of order.

MR. JOYCE: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

I asked questions today about Hughes Brook Hill and some contracts. The minister mentioned to me that the contracts would be coming. When I made up the questions and

added the questions, to the best of my knowledge, the contracts were not let, but I say to the minister, I did check the Web site as you said. The contract was sent out to be tendered.

I just apologize to the minister. It was done. When I did up the questions, I was not aware of it. I just went back; it just showed up on the Web site. To the minister, for the questions today, when you said they would be coming soon, they are put out now to be awarded.

MR. SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile.

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

I am happy to stand up here. Again, it may not have been a point of order, but I think the point the member is trying to make got across and I am sure the Minister of Transportation heard.

I am very happy to stand here again and speak to this Budget, whether it is Concurrence, whether it is sub-amendment, whether it is non-confidence, or whether it is the main motion. I am happy any chance I get to stand in this House and talk about this Budget that this government has brought, and right now it is during the Concurrence section.

When you are in the Opposition, one of the things you get to do is basically have a role as a critic of a department. I have had many different roles during my short tenure here, but right now, obviously, I am the critic for CYFS, Child, Youth and Family Services, and the critic for Health. Both are extremely important departments. Both are worth talking about.

CYFS is a department that you really hope you do not have to talk about. You do not want to hear much about it because that means that nothing is happening and that is a good thing. We do not like to hear about some of the things that come out because we have seen it here in this House. We have asked a number of questions on situations.

One thing I do want to say is I was privy to some information today and it did arise in

Question Period. That is about the recent decision when it comes to Blue sky in Stephenville. I understand there has been some trouble when it comes to the zoning. I have been contacted by people who are involved or who will be employed there. They are very concerned about it. Some have left jobs to take this position; some have just started here. They are quite worried. I am sure the minister is on top of this and his department will make sure these workers are taken care of and primarily, most importantly, that the people involved, the children and the workers, everybody who is involved, is taken care of.

Now, I do want to go on to a number of issues I have to bring up. That is one of the things. When you are doing Question Period, we have twenty-three minutes to ask questions. It is hard to get all the important issues affecting this Province out in twenty-three minutes. We could use hours and hours to ask questions. One of the things I am going to put out now is a chance to talk about some of the health issues I have talked to people about, I have learned about, and I did have an opportunity to mention during the Estimates section, which is a great opportunity.

Many people do not understand the different, small phases to the Budget. Certainly, I did not before I came here. I was not aware of how it happened, but once you get in you realize how important these sessions are. It is an opportunity, if people are listening out there, for the critics to sit on one side and spend three hours going through the budgetary allocation for that department, the Estimates, and what was actually estimated and spent last year for a particular department. You have the minister present and you have all the different staff, deputy ministers, assistant deputy ministers, and et cetera, available.

It was great to sit there the other day and talk about the Health Department and some of the issues. As I have said before, there are a lot of questions I have on health that I do not get an opportunity to ask in Question Period, not that they are not important, but it is just there are so many issues. We have so many of us who want to ask questions, so many departments, and some of these can be very limited to the number of people affected. In some cases they affect a lot of people. The main reason I ask is because

sometimes I wonder about the decision making involved and why these are happening. I wonder why they are done.

One decision I asked about, and unfortunately in the Estimates process I never got any information or answers as to why this was done, and I want to talk about pharmaceuticals and about the NLPDP. There is a specific drug called Olmetec, and that is a drug that is used to treat blood pressure used by a number of people in this Province. It is a drug for which there is no other strain that has as much efficacy. It is the superior strain. A number of people are on it, and through the help of their doctor and the use of this medication they are controlling their condition.

What happened was the department actually came out, put out a bulletin, and said: We are cutting this. They said you must try, and they listed out five different strains they must try before you can use Olmetec. I do not have the names here because they are very detailed names and I could sit here. There are five types. It is on the bulletin and I listed them out in Estimates.

I can understand on an ongoing basis starting now if you have people coming in presenting with this condition, try this. My question was, for the people who are currently on it, why would we take them off that when their health situation is stabilized and good to try other drugs only to come back to this one? The reason is the department does this because of cost savings. That is right; the bean counters in the department are more worried about saving a dollar sometimes than they are about the health of the people they represent. I do not mind saying that because I actually asked it. Why are you doing this? Their information suggests –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER (Verge): Order, please!

MR. A. PARSONS: I am trying my best to get this information out because it is a decision that the department made and that they are making to save dollars, and it is affecting people's lives. I asked: What are the savings you are realizing by changing this specific drug? Well, we do not have those numbers; we do not have this. Then

the case becomes: Why would you take somebody off a superior drug and put them on a less useful drug? What is the logic behind that? Well, our research suggests that it is actually better.

I am willing to bet, because I have my information which I am going to provide to the department to show that when it is all said and done, when it is all broken down – and I hope somebody up there is listening – they are making a decision not based on research. They are not making a decision that is based on what is the best thing to do for patient care. They are making a decision based on saving a dollar at the expense of someone's health. That is simply how it is. I do not know whether they like it or not, but that is how it is going here.

We are already playing with people's lives when it comes to that, trying to save money. The other thing they do not realize sometimes is that it costs people more money on the back end because you take somebody off this drug which has stabilized their condition and they try them on a different drug. What happens is this person has a bad reaction. This person's health deteriorates and worsens, and what happens? They end up in the hospital.

The rough cost to go in the hospital is about \$1,500 a day. That is just to sit there in the bed. You have not been looked at yet and you have not been treated – \$1,500 a day. The question becomes, then, if we want to talk about fiscal management, what did you save by fooling around with the drugs and what is it costing you because you did it? This is what I keep coming back to, fiscal mismanagement, because in the particular department one hand does not know what the other is doing. They are not saving the money; they are spending more money, and they are affecting people's lives. So, I had to put that out there.

Now, I could not get the answers I wanted that day. I asked some very specific questions; the answers were not available. I have since written – and I will give the minister all the credit in the world. He said: Any question we cannot answer, we will undertake to provide you with that information. I appreciate that. So I have my letter sent off, and I hope I get it back in a timely fashion, because they should have those

numbers there. This should not be a case of: Well, we need to figure it out and calculate it. This should be calculated. If you are taking somebody off a drug, what did the drug cost? What are you saving? There it is. There should not be anything more complicated than that involved. Again, these are the decisions that are happening when it comes to health.

I could also talk about something I brought up here in the House the other day when we recognized the value of work done by nurses. One of the things – and I talked to a number of nurses over the weekend. I said: I am hearing something here; can you tell me whether it is true or not? When you go into hospital and you are there on the ward you are provided with a meal. You are provided with your breakfast, provided with your lunch, provided with your supper. Your supper is usually served around 5:30 p.m.

Before, they would have a night snack: a hot drink, maybe a tea or coffee, maybe a glass of juice, maybe some cookies or a piece of toast – because again, you are fed at 5:30 p.m.; you do not get to eat again until 8:30 a.m. – but that has been cut. What they get now is maybe two crackers and a glass of water – two crackers and a glass of water. I know that to be true, because I believe the nurses to be telling me the truth, I believe the patients to be telling me the truth, and I know – and again, it is not their decision. It is not any of the staff at these hospitals; it is the higher-ups making decisions.

Again, I really have to wonder when you talk about how great things are, are things really that great when you are taking food away from somebody in the hospital and giving them a cracker and a glass of water? So do not tell me how good things are when you are making decisions like this that are beyond ridiculous. Again, I will sit here next year and ask what are the savings you saved by giving these people who are sick crackers and a glass of water, and not letting them have a cup of tea or a piece of toast.

I am just putting that out there, I know it to be true, I have not got a satisfactory answer to it; but again, we are going to save dollars – this is how we are going to save them; we are going to save them by denying people a cup of tea.

Now, I am going to move on to something else in health care. Again, this one amazes me, this one was in the news, and this comes to – we talk about mental health in this Province. The good news is that through the work of advocates in this Province and on a national scale, you look at someone like Clara Hughes, the work that she has done when it comes to stigma. I will give the Province credit. I was at the unveiling. The minister was there; he was very new on the job. The minister got up and talked about the new advertising about reducing stigma. I applaud it; I applaud it because it is the right thing to do. The first thing we have to do is understand, and the best way to understand is to educate people and the best way to do that is sometimes getting the ads out there so that people can see.

I have seen them. I have been watching hockey, like a lot of other people. You see the ad on; we are reaching people and we are educating them, and that is great. Not like some of the ads I have seen on in the past where they put the ad on and you check the Website and it was the link to nowhere, it did not work, again which shows you how big a waste it is. These look good and I hope they get the effect that they need; but again, at the end of the day, we have to treat mental health like we treat every other part of health care, something like a broken leg, something like diabetes, we have to treat it with the importance that it deserves.

We are getting the word out, but the problem I have is when we find out that the mobile crisis unit here in St. John's, if you call in on Wednesday, not a problem, they are there; call in on Friday, they are there; Saturday and Sunday, they are there; but God forbid if you call in on Monday or Tuesday because they are not there. Because mental health is only five days a week. Mental health is not seven days a week.

So the first question I asked in Estimates was: Is this a budgetary decision? They said: No, it is not a budgetary decision. It is not a case of: Look, we can only afford to do five days a week. We cannot do the seven; we just do not have the funding. Not that I would have agreed with that or accepted that, but at least I would have seen the logic in why they made that decision.

That was not the reason; it was not a case of money. If it is not a case of money, why would you treat somebody with this situation, a mental illness, treat somebody's mental health differently on Monday than you treat it on Wednesday? Or even more importantly, I hope we do not start using this same approach to health care when it comes to other ailments. Oh God, I have chest pains. Well, sorry, Sir, you called in on Friday, we are not available on Friday. You have to have your chest pains on Saturday. That is how we are going to treat health care.

Again, it shows the inherent fallacy of this department when it comes to treating something like this. The reason is when you break it down to its most basic, they do not think mental health is as important as physical health. Because if you can get your broken leg treated seven days a week but mental health, we only have a mobile crisis unit available – the minister talked about the help line. That is great that is there, but my question is not the help line; that is not what I was asking about. My question was on a mobile unit.

I am hearing more disturbing things about how it is going out on the West Coast, too, and we will get to those because, again, if we are not going to accept the fact or if we are not going to treat mental health as serious as we treat everything else, then the system is bound for failure from the beginning.

I know there was lots of staff there, and I never heard one answer on why this was being done or why it should be done – not one. Again, I am asking the questions but I am not getting the answers.

We can continue on. There are so many things in health, when we talk about the NLPDP and the prescription drugs. We can talk about the fact that diabetes in this Province is going up. We are the worst in the country. One good thing that I have heard for some time now, probably since Easter – and again, I do not know how this came about, but the good news is that through the work of many people, including the advocates on the West Coast, the West Coast regional team – I applauded them. I spoke at their rally that they had in Corner Brook, for which there was over 400 people. I said I

applaud the fact that you not the Corner Brook team, you are the West Coast team because they are treating people in Port aux Basques. They are treating people in Burgeo. They are treating people in St. Anthony. They are treating people on the West Coast, and now they are advocating for the hospital. The hospital that was announced in 2007 and has been re-announced and re-announced and re-announced, ad nauseam, with absolutely no – we have not seen anything yet.

The good news is that after the work of people like the Member for Bay of Islands, who everybody knows how many times since we came here in 2011, actually the spring of 2012, how many times has he stood up and asked a question about the Corner Brook hospital? How many times has he stood up? He did and it is funny, he got turned down so many times, denied. You are wrong, you are wrong, you are wrong, you are wrong; but, for some reason, there was a leap of faith by government some time here in the early part of 2014. We were suddenly not wrong. We were right. Not only are you going to get one radiation unit, you might get two.

So, the question I have is: What happened in the little span of time to make them come around? Again, it was not just the Member for Humber East, the current Premier, it was not just the incoming Premier, the Member for Humber West, all saying all of a sudden, it is good; it is right; you are on the right track.

So again, all I can do there is two things. I can commend government for listening to us and I will accept your apology, or the Member for Bay of Islands will accept your apology whenever you want to tell him he was right all along, because he was. The Member for Bay of Islands stood up today and apologized when he was wrong. He stood up and he said: I apologize. He is waiting for that apology back when it comes to the hospital in Corner Brook and how he was right. I want to see that.

There are still a lot of questions here. The bigger thing is two-fold. Number one, the hospital is still not started. So it is not like we have to give up now. Just because this fight was won does not mean that there are not more battles to be fought.

The other thing that is scary, though, is that we have heard, and I confirmed this in Question Period, we asked questions on ultrasound services. The fear now out on the West Coast is that you are going to win one battle at the expense of something else; you will get that, but you are going to lose this. You are getting something on one end, you are going to lose it on the other end, and that is not the way this needs to be approached.

We will do what we have done here. The Leader of the Opposition, the Member for Bay of Islands, the advocates, and the community will do the work, will do the research, and find out if it should be there. If it should be there, if it is the right move to make, both for the health outcomes of the people of this Province, especially on the West Coast, if it is the right fiscal decision, then we will put the information out there and hopefully it gets done.

We will continue that battle, there is absolutely no doubt. More questions will be asked. We are hearing lots of stuff. To take a government phrase, stay tuned because we have more questions. We are not going anywhere on that.

I want to continue. There are so many other topics and I would like an opportunity to talk about some district issues. I see now I do have a little bit of time left, but given the hour of the day, at this time, Mr. Speaker, I am going to adjourn debate.

MR. SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded, I say to the hon. Member for Burgeo – La Poile, that the debate now adjourn.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

With the consent of my colleagues, we will take a break for supper at this point in time and come back around 7:00 o'clock.

MR. SPEAKER: This House now stands in recess until 7:00 p.m.