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Speaker: Honourable Ross Wiseman, MHA

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The House resumed sitting at 7:00 p.m.

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At this time I call from the Order Paper, debate on the Concurrence Motion 2.(a) Social Services Committee.

MR. SPEAKER: We are now debating Concurrence.

The hon. the Member for Port de Grave.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLEJOHN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a privilege to stand up tonight here at Concurrence. For the people at home, Mr. Speaker, basically what Concurrence is – we have three committees in government. We have the Government Resource Committee, the Government Services Committee, and the Social Services Committee, and we have a thing called Estimates, where all government departments and agencies come before the various committees and present. Basically, we go through each individual line department's budget line by line.

Mr. Speaker, sometimes we get into some frank discussion on policy back and forth by members and the various line departments, but most of the time we try to keep it relevant to the line items that are in the Estimates. Ministers, I must say, and department officials, have been very, very co-operative and very – for lack of a better word – liberal in terms of answering questions of concern by various members of our committee.

This is my third year Chairing the Social Services Committee and I want to take this opportunity to thank the various members of our Social Services Committee: the hon. the Member for Port au Port; the hon. the Member for Bonavista South; the hon. the Member for Baie Verte – Springdale; the hon. the Member for St. John's Centre; the hon. the Member for Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair, and the hon. the Member for St. John's North.

Mr. Speaker, it is common that at times other hon. members fill in for members. It is quite common on the Opposition side, Mr. Speaker, for those in the audience, that when we are doing a particular line department, the Opposition critic for that department normally fills in and does that in various departments. So, we want to thank those members as well, who have filled in and subbed in from time to time and came before the committee.

During our deliberations we reviewed various departments. We reviewed the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services; the Department of Education; the Department of Justice; the Department of Health and Community Services; the Department of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs, including the Office of Public Engagement; the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, and also the Labour Relations Agency.

One of the significant things about the Social Services Committee, Mr. Speaker, is that the social sector of government takes up 58.6 per cent of the overall Budget. So, 58.6 per cent of the overall Budget is taken up in the social sector. Obviously, Mr. Speaker, the largest portion of that is taken up by the Department of Health. Some 37.6 per cent of government's Budget goes to Health. A little over \$3 billion goes into our health sector and our Health budget.

As well, Mr. Speaker, about 11 per cent of the remaining 56 per cent goes into Education; about \$880 million is in Education. So those two departments, Health and Education combined, take up about 48.6 per cent of the overall Social Services Committee budget, or the social sector budget. It is very, very significant.

Mr. Speaker, this year this government in its social sector spending increased its spending from \$4.4 billion last year in 2013-2014 to some \$4.6 billion in this year's Budget, an increase of about half a per cent. Mr. Speaker, normally when we do this we try to highlight some of the things that have been discussed in the various departments, and there is much to discuss. There was much conversation.

In Education, for example, the continued freeze on tuition. It is very important, Mr. Speaker, the freeze on tuition. It came out of Advanced Education and Skills, but it is very significant. It is very significant for those young high school students; Grade 12 graduates going on to post-secondary education.

Mr. Speaker, in a year or so I will be a proud parent and my son will be into the same thing, trying to decide what post-secondary education he will take. Our continued freeze on post-secondary tuition will certainly make our institutions, the College of the North Atlantic, Memorial University, and the Marine Institute more favourable in his choosing.

AN HON. MEMBER: A big difference in the debt.

MR. LITTLEJOHN: A very big difference.

Mr. Speaker, as well, the elimination of the provincial student loan portion. That will cut down the overall debt of students by about 40 per cent. Forty per cent is significant over a four-year term, an undergraduate program. A student and families – I recall the hon. Member for Cape St. Francis here standing up today talking about the importance of education and how important education is to him. Well, education is important to me as well. Mr. Speaker, a 40 per cent saving is significant savings for families who are trying to put their children through post-secondary education.

Mr. Speaker, maybe the most dramatic, and one that was talked about significantly in our Education Estimates, was the implementation of full-day Kindergarten. Now, the implementation of full-day Kindergarten is going to have a dramatic impact on our young children. There was a lot of debate, a lot of conversation, and a lot of questions that went back and forth across the floor to the Minister of Education about the implementation of full-day Kindergarten and the impacts that may have.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say in that discussion all parties agreed that the implementation of full-day Kindergarten is a good thing. Are there challenges, Mr. Speaker? I think the minister outlined some of the challenges. We are going to need portable classrooms for some schools.

We have some schools right now, particularly here on the Northeast Avalon, to use an expression, are busting at the seams. Busting at the seams, Mr. Speaker, so we are going to need some portable classrooms to accommodate the implementation of full-day Kindergarten.

I want to get a plug in for my own district here. I was very pleased in the Budget of the announcement for a new school for Coley's Point Primary.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLEJOHN: A school that is an old wooden structure, sixty years old, Mr. Speaker.

I have heard members opposite talk about here on the Northeast Avalon students and staff and teachers working out of broom closets. Well, Mr. Speaker, let me tell you, students at Coley's Point Primary, and teachers at Coley's Point Primary have been doing that for many, many years. I want to compliment the teachers of Coley's Point Primary for the quality of education they have been giving our children in this sixty-year-old wooden structure. Again, what I want to say is I want to thank government for the opportunity to announce a new school for Coley's Point Primary.

Mr. Speaker, one of the other significant things, and it was talked about fairly substantially in our debate, was the student assistant support. This year government saw fit to put another million dollars of support into our student assistant support program. That will add about an additional 43,000 hours of student support for our children in our schools. Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that is significant; 43,000 hours I think is a significant amount of additional support.

Mr. Speaker, I know something about the special services and special needs. My wife has been a special education teacher at the primary level for twenty-six years. Sometimes I stand here and listen to members opposite think they are the only ones who know anything about special needs and special services of our children in this Province.

Well, Mr. Speaker, being married to a special education teacher for the last twenty-three years,

I think I can speak very well of the special education teachers and the student support systems that are in our schools. Is it all perfect? Definitely not, Mr. Speaker, there is always room for improvement, but it is not as bad as made out by the Opposition.

We also had Health and Community Services. Health and Community Services is so vast, and there are so many needs and there were so many discussion points. This year, Mr. Speaker, it was kind of unique, because during the Estimates we ended up in a Cabinet shuffle. We ended up with some new ministers taking on new responsibilities and basically they were only days old in their new portfolios when they came before Estimates. I want to congratulate them.

That was the case with Minister Davis. Minister Davis came forward, and I think he was on the –

MR. SPEAKER: You mean the Minister of Health and Community Services.

MR. LITTLEJOHN: The Minister of Health, I am sorry, yes.

Minister Davis came forward as the Minister of Health. It has been a long day already, Mr. Speaker. Minister Davis came through –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

AN HON. MEMBER: You are not allowed to use names.

MR. LITTLEJOHN: The Minister of Health and Community Services was only six days old when he finally came to Estimates. It was a good job. Mr. Speaker, there is a lot of significant things that went on in the Health and Community Services budget and I would like to highlight some of those.

I have heard the Opposition critic, the Member for Burgeo – La Poile talk a lot about the need for new born screening, particularly for young children with a potential for cystic fibrosis. I know the member opposite has talked about other things in terms of cystic fibrosis, but, Mr. Speaker, in my district I have an advocate for cystic fibrosis. She has met with me on a number of occasions. One of the things she saw

that she thought was important was also new born screening for children with cystic fibrosis, and I was glad to see that it was in this year's budget at a cost of \$168,000.

Mr. Speaker, also in this year's budget there was money in it for an enhanced Provincial Home Dialysis Program. That is something that is a little bit close to my heart because many years ago as a volunteer with the Trinity Conception Placentia Health Foundation we raised funds for dialysis at the Carbonear General Hospital. I know how difficult it is for people on dialysis to travel great distances, and enhancing the Home Dialysis Program takes away some of that travel.

Mr. Speaker, some dialysis patients have to travel two and three hours, and most dialysis patients need to have dialysis two to three times a week, some for more than three hours, some all day long. The enhanced Provincial Home Dialysis Program was a great benefit to these people. It saves them from travelling. I know people who have home dialysis are greatly appreciative of the expanded program.

Mr. Speaker, as well, we spent \$1.5 million on a new hemodialysis site in Bonavista, for the Member for Bonavista South. He is a member of our committee. He was advocating for that for some time. This year there is \$1.5 million for that new unit in Bonavista. It was good.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLEJOHN: Mr. Speaker, we also invested about \$1.2 million to address needs that were in Stephenville on the West Coast, for our dialysis people on the West Coast. We also had to address needs of our patients here in St. John's. These units are working basically around the clock and over time they need to be replaced. Some of these new additional monies will help to upgrade and replace some of this dialysis equipment.

Mr. Speaker, we can go on here. I know the member opposite as well, the Opposition critic, he talked a lot about and he questioned a lot about the smoking cessation program. I believe both Opposition members talked significantly about the smoking cessation program, what that would involve, and how many times could a

person go on and off. That conversation went on.

Mr. Speaker, for most people smoking is a lifelong addiction, and trying to get people to cease smoking is a challenge. Programs like the smoking cessation program hopefully will improve our health. There is nothing better we can do for our people than improve their health. By implementing a smoking cessation program, particularly for our low-income people, it is very important.

One of the nice things about this, Mr. Speaker, it is not a one-time deal. People get three opportunities. As was said in committee, sometimes they like to practice. The first time is just like practice. You go out and you do it the first time just to see what it feels like. It usually takes a second or third time before you actually cease smoking. Again, much discussion took place around smoking cessation.

Also, Mr. Speaker, a lot of discussion around long-term care facilities. We all know our population is aging and now the need for long-term care facilities. In Labrador, we have a new twenty-bed expansion in Labrador, in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. I know the Member for Lake Melville has been advocating for that expansion for quite some time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLEJOHN: I want to congratulate him on that.

There was a lot of conversation around the long-term care needs of our citizens and our older population. Again, Mr. Speaker, we are trying. We have a new long-term care facility here in St. John's. We have a new long-term care facility in the District of Carbonear – Harbour Grace, and we have a new long-term care facility in Lewisporte. All of these facilities are trying to address the needs of our aging population.

Mr. Speaker, we could go on and on here. Another very important topic that came up in the Health and Community Services budget was autism, the need of improvements to autism. I am very proud to announce that we have twenty-two new positions to improve our autism service

in the Province. I want to congratulate the former Minister of Health and Community Services because I know she worked long and hard for these things.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLEJOHN: I want to thank her for her work on that.

Again, Mr. Speaker, these are issues that came up in Estimates. All these things came up and they were discussed, questions back and forth. I must say to the minister and his staff of Health and Community Services, they did a wonderful job of explaining and going through that service.

Then, Mr. Speaker, we come to Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs. There are a number of issues there, but most of the time when you get to Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs it is all about the needs of communities and what we are doing in terms of municipal infrastructure. A lot of discussion took place around municipal infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, this year in this budget we announced \$200 million for new municipal infrastructure over three years. Twenty-two of our largest communities would have \$100 million of multi-capital works, as we call it, and the other \$100 million would be for the other communities.

Mr. Speaker, there are many needs out there. We need clean drinking water. We need new water and sewer services. We have many needs. Our communities have many needs and these dollars will go a long way in addressing that.

I want to thank the minister for the announcements in my district of Port de Grave: \$3 million of multi-capital works money for the Town of Bay Roberts; \$600,000 for the Town of Spaniard's Bay; and \$400,000 to continue a water and sewer project in the Town of Clarkes Beach. These are just some of the infrastructure improvements that we had in my district, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the minister for that.

As well, Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about the \$5 million that we put in support of our volunteer firefighters. I come from a family of volunteer

firefighters and I know their dedication and the efforts that they put in. Our firefighters today are not just firefighters, they are first responders, they are first-aiders, and they are paramedics. These people take time to get trained. They dedicate themselves. No matter the time of the day or night, 365 days, twenty-four seven, these people answer the call.

I have to say in my own district we have some very, very dedicated volunteer fire departments and my hat goes off to them. Hopefully, Mr. Speaker, some of this \$5 million in support will come to the District of Port de Grave because we do have some needs. I am sure as the minister reviews his –

MR. KING: You will be looked at too.

MR. LITTLEJOHN: I will be looked at too? Thank you, Government House Leader.

The last thing, Mr. Speaker, because my time is winding down and I will get another chance, I want to talk about the money that we also put into search and rescue.

AN HON. MEMBER: Coley's Point school.

MR. LITTLEJOHN: I talked about Coley's Point school, Sir. I thank you for Coley's Point school.

The money that we put into search and rescue – \$550,000 extra was put into search and rescue. Mr. Speaker, in my district we have the Avalon North Wolverines, another dedicated group of volunteers throughout the region who, when people are lost in the woods or people are missing, are first persons there. They dedicate themselves to training, orientation, and all the rest. I want to take my hat off to them. I think money going to search and rescue is a good investment.

Mr. Speaker, I see my time is winding down. I will get another opportunity. I thank you for your time. I look forward to listening to the rest of the conversation.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

As the critic for the Office of Public Engagement, I sat with the Member for Bay of Islands in debate in the Estimates Committee and we asked a lot of questions. One of the things about Concurrence and looking at all the questions that were put forward is around government's ability to be open, accountable, and transparent.

When I sat in and questioned the minister with the Office of Public Engagement, we asked about the Open Government Initiative and why when it was launched it had outdated information and when we would go and see how we are going to get more live data up there, what the consultation process would be. When I sat in with the Minister of IBRD in Estimates, she committed that we would have the communities that have broadband Internet in Newfoundland and Labrador. This is the second year in a row that it has been committed; I hope that the information is going to come forward.

When asked about having it publicly disclosed as Open Government Initiative, to make sure that everybody is aware of what communities, what regions have broadband Internet, I thought that would be a great initiative to put up that kind of spatial map. That is innovative thinking. That is something that a Liberal government would look at doing: making things so that people can make good decisions.

On the Great Northern Peninsula, for example, we have a Web site that showcases the communities on the Great Northern Peninsula. It talks about the services and the business offerings, it talks about the community, and everything is there. It even says if there is cell coverage and if there is high-speed Internet. Why can't our own government replicate that on a much broader scale? We need to see that.

Another matter when we talk about public engagement, the youth engagement falls under that. I think we are really missing the boat in Newfoundland and Labrador when it comes to how we engage our youth and how we make

them part of the process. That is so important. We had a Youth Retention and Attraction Strategy with forty-one initiatives, many of those were cut, and they have fallen off the government's radar. They even axed and cancelled the Youth Advisory Committee; let that go to the wayside. Where is the accountability? Where is the listening to our youth in this Province?

Those are the types of challenges that we face, when a government says they are open and accountable and transparent. We have seen legislation put before the House of Assembly even this week, the whistleblower legislation, that did not have the public consultation, yet the former Minister of Justice said the reason why we could not put this forward before the House in 2007 is because we need to do the public consultation. There is a lot of mismatch in information that has coming forward.

I will say we need to see things that the Member for Port de Grave had talked about. As a member of this House of Assembly, I have put forward a private member's motion on safe and clean drinking water. That is something that needs to be made a great priority. The former Minister of Municipal Affairs, I certainly have to thank him in his role of investing in water projects in my district previously and the work that has been done to try and look at enhancing water projects.

Now that we have the investment made in certain municipalities like St. Lunaire-Griquet, we see that they are still challenged. There is a significant amount of silt. There needs to be work done on how we can improve water quality. Having that working relationship is certainly key and important as we move forward on advancing clean drinking water. It is essential for everyone. We need to make sure communities that are not public bodies also have greater enforcement when it comes to testing private wells and public bodies of water, not necessarily municipalities or local service districts. There needs to be greater accountability there.

As the Member for Port de Grave proudly mentioned in his speech as he started, he said the social services sector spent \$4.4 billion last year. We are spending even more this year, \$4.6

billion. It is not necessarily something to be proud about that you are spending more money. More money does not necessarily mean better outcomes. It is about having better delivery of service, find greater efficiencies, and make improvements so that we have better health outcomes for people. That is one sector that is here is the Department of Health and Community Services.

I have said before in this House of Assembly, under the Grenfell health board and under Labrador-Grenfell Health, the St. Anthony area as well as Happy Valley-Goose Bay has had midwives. These midwives have assisted the majority of births in St. Anthony and that has helped significantly.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. MITCHELMORE: In all the low-risk births they have provided great continuity of care before and after a birth, prenatal and postnatal. This helps reduce the overall cost to the health care system.

Ontario right now I believe has more midwives in their public service, in their public health care system, than they do the obstetricians. Midwifery is something that we should move on. We have in the past. It has been accessible for people. People have a right to choose. Women have that right to choose. It is good for families.

The former Minister of Health made the announcement stating that it would be five to seven years before it would be made available in the public sector, in our RHAs, but only one year for the private sector, so we certainly know where the government currently is. It is about privatization of services, not about making things publicly available to people, and accessible. Especially in some of the more rural areas of the Province, you will not see privatized service like midwifery set up.

Another major issue when we look at health care is around physiotherapy services. We have a critical lack of physiotherapists, especially in rural settings. There is a significant wait-list. I know in St. Anthony, on the whole Northern

Peninsula, they have only two physiotherapists. At one point it was only one, and now they will have two, but a significant backlog. They are not able to accept any WHSC cases. They deal primarily with internal patients at the hospital, and some of it is long-term patients. It is very difficult to get an appointment there.

People have to drive to Deer Lake. They have to drive 400 kilometres each way to see a physiotherapist. So, you can understand why people are not getting the care they need, and the risk of re-injury. It is the same thing where we have not had occupational therapy.

The whole issue around recruitment and retention of health care professionals is certainly key. We need to see more of that. Making sure that if we have those services then we are less likely to see more emergency room visits, which would be a higher cost, as well as looking at the number of beds in hospitals that are filled up by people who really need a long-term care bed. These people are also being discharged as well and sent home.

These are significant challenges, because we do need to look at long-term care. It is a big challenge. I have put forward an idea of looking at some of the smaller clinics we have, that have the staff there twenty-four seven, of utilizing space within those facilities. Like the White Bay Central Health Centre where you could have four, maybe six beds offered. That would provide care closer to home without radically increasing costs to health care, and we would be taking care of more people, not less.

One of the positive things in the Estimates in the Budget there is the reduction in the kilometres for medical travel. Because we do know so many people have to travel outside of the region for medical travel, and that has gone down. As well, we have seen the kilometre amount will be increased based on the Budget.

Dental services, it is a huge issue in the district. When the Adult Dental Program came out – we are still seeing people waiting for their dentures from that program, from the initial uptake. In the Labrador-Grenfell Health setting, in St. Anthony particularly, you do not have fee-based dental service. That in itself has limited access to dental care because of the way it is being

offered. It is an issue. There needs to be something done because this is how dental services are offered throughout the Province.

I am very pleased to see the announcement in the Budget for Bonavista when it comes to dialysis service there. It is a great announcement. We understand when you have a growing need – we have seen people lobby for that service. There were a number of people having to travel to Clarenville. When people need dialysis in adverse weather conditions they need it close to home, so that is a great investment.

In my very own district, we have a similar challenge where we had a number of people who have had vehicle accidents. They could not get dialysis, appointments were cancelled, and people have been lobbying. They have been lobbying to see satellite dialysis added to the Strait of Belle Isle Health Centre, a new health care centre that was \$9 million basically invested in the district. This can be an opportunity because there are a significant number of people – some people would come back home if the service was also offered locally. There needs to be a broader assessment when you look at delivery of health care, and if by adding a service we can see cost savings.

I want to talk a little bit about the Department of Advanced Education and Skills. I want to say that one of the programs that have been offered through the Department of Advanced Education and Skills is a targeted initiative for older workers. My district of the Straits – White Bay North has a lot of older workers. Some of them have been displaced from the cod moratorium. Others have seen downsizes, whether it be in fish plants or the forest sector.

This program provides a great complement of working with the College of the North Atlantic locally. Providing local instructors to come in and do training, to provide advice, to give presentations for these workers to get skills, to be able to maybe look at starting their own business, start a part-time business with the products they learned to make and sell, or they could also look at attaching to the labour market.

I was very fortunate to see two programs that are currently ongoing. One in Main Brook, which is

a carpentry program that is teaching people. They are going to learn the whole process, which will complete a fifty by seventy building that is of aluminum structure that has been put there through hard work of local people. This will be a great asset once complete because it allows some vibrancy in the community from a social setting and also to look at bringing in people to do various training, to generate revenue.

This is a positive investment. You need to have social spaces in our communities. Every group, whether it is youth, whether it is seniors, having a social space in the community that is accessible is very positive. We have seen some announcements where that is the case, as well as Englee.

In Englee we saw where the former fish plant was removed and the site was remediated, and we are seeing right now where a lot of workers were displaced. Now in Englee there are people who are learning how to make glass art. This is a town that has also looked at doing rug hooking. They have an exhibit there in the town hall.

They also have somebody working as part of a JCP with the French Shore that is going to lead to an exhibit, doing a tapestry depicting the French culture for 300 years. It is going to go on tour across the Province. In places like Placentia, Stephenville – St. George's, the Port au Port area. It will travel across Province and promote our French culture and heritage, just like on the Great Northern Peninsula.

When we look at some of the challenges, though – we have challenges when it comes to looking at the college system. We have to look at programming and how it is changing, and how administration puts out and notifies people of when they are accepted into a program; the wait-list and how they deal with that. These are issues. Those are things that the minister is going to have to address.

I have some concerns with the increase of the \$100, to \$1,950, for personal care homes in the Province. I have been informed that this is not a \$100 up-front payment on July 1. It will be rolled out, at least in Labrador-Grenfell Health, \$50 at a time. When the Budget was announced

people had the indication they would get the \$100 up front.

As well, when we look at the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services, I want to welcome the minister to this role. I have seen the benefits of child care and how we have made affordable child care available, in my district in particular, through a non-profit setting. I got to attend the Riddles and Rhymes daycare, and in it they celebrated twenty years, noting that they had some hard times. They have had challenges throughout, but now they are seeing the real success and stability.

Not too long ago a group of women in the community, primarily mothers, expecting mothers, and community leaders got together and formed the Straits Daycare Corporation. That is something that is up and started and is a great investment because it will help with the recruitment and retention of workers. We need that, and that links to the Department of Advanced Education and Skills and the array of services that are needed.

One of the things that I think is completely unacceptable, that the former Minister of Education has done and has approved, is looking at closing the St. Lunaire-Griquet public library. The public library is still listed as temporarily closed, despite the former Minister of Education saying this will not close. We will not close any public libraries. It will be made available. Once the school, Bayview Regional Collegiate, closes we will look for alternate space.

You have another school that has space in Gunners Cove that does not have to cost a penny. It is in the same town. St. Lunaire-Griquet, Gunners Cove, one amalgamated town, the school is in the town; why not put the library there? There are other spaces available.

Why would you take books away from our children, from people who need it the most, take away Internet access to people, to provide that space, that opportunity when it comes to availability of a digital camera and the business services, fax services that are available at public libraries and programming that exists as well? There is a real opportunity. When we have some of the highest illiteracy in the Province that exists based on statistics, we should not be

closing public libraries. That is something that is not acceptable at all.

Since the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation is listed under these Estimates and I am trying to stick primarily to the Concurrence to make it something that – when we talk about things in Estimates, I want to make this very relevant. The Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation is certainly faced with challenges.

In the fall, just before Christmas, Habitat for Humanity came. We have had four people take up homes through a Habitat for Humanity project in St. Anthony. The Newfoundland and Labrador Housing saw three homes be vacated because people were eligible for these homes. Now they are going to be homeowners.

We still see vacancies in those Newfoundland and Labrador Housing units because they have not been renovated. They have not been renovated or upgraded so we are still leaving people who need access to affordable social housing through Newfoundland and Labrador Housing. This is happening throughout the Province.

Why aren't we doing the upgrades in a timely manner so that people who are on wait-lists who need housing get access to housing right now? It is just completely unacceptable that it is delayed and that it is taking so long. We are months and months later. We have seen that time and time again from this government where things are delayed and delayed and delayed.

I believe the Member for Bay of Islands earlier today had talked about how government wanted to get tenders out early. They had announced a number of tenders for PC districts. There is a real delay. The work is not being done. I have seen it in my own district where work has been delayed, it has been carried over, and we have not seen that start yet. We need to see clear planning so that when things do get delayed – and sometimes things get delayed for good reason. If not, at tail end of the season, things that are at the end, that get carried over, are done first and people are informed of when they are going to actually be done, so that people can actually plan around other projects and other needs that they have in their community.

What we are looking at, from a social perspective and in the social sector committee, is how we provide the services to meet the needs of people, the programs that are necessary for the public good. In doing so, we cannot make sure that we are just throwing money at initiatives, like the Member for Port de Grave talked about, that there is an increase of \$200 million in the Social Services Committee, despite all the cutbacks that happened last year. So, are we getting to spend, spend, and balloon, balloon – we are borrowing a billion dollars.

I see, Mr. Speaker, that my time has expired. I will have an opportunity to speak another time.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. CORNETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a pleasure to be up on my feet tonight in this Concurrence debate to talk about the debate we had on the Estimates of the social services sector. Mr. Speaker, our Committee reviewed the Estimates of the Departments of Child, Youth and Family Services; Education; Health and Community Services; Justice; Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs; Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation; the Office of Public Engagement; and the Labour Relations Board.

Mr. Speaker, if we look at the overall Budget and look at past Budgets of this Administration, the bulk or the majority of our spending goes into these programs of these departments that offer and provide social safety nets to the people of this Province who need it and request it.

Mr. Speaker, as we go through this important process – the budgetary process – we can get an in-depth overview of the programs and spending in each department. As we went through each department, it was obvious that a tremendous work has been done and tremendous amounts of money have been allocated or invested in each

department to ensure delivery of services to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

It is indeed great to see the solid and strong foundation that this Administration has built, the new initiatives we are embarking on. This process is a format, as well, to give us an indication of how programs and services are to be delivered, and how it is to be implemented and rolled out. This spells out, Mr. Speaker, government's plans to deliver effective and efficient programs and services to its people.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I will go through the departments, as we went through Estimates. First, let's look at the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services. What I will give you now is a synopsis or snapshot of the mandate or vision of the department. This department is responsible for the planning and development of policies, standards and programs, as well as service delivery to help ensure the safety and well-being of our children and youth in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The legislative framework which governs the provision of services for children, youth and families in this Province include Children and Youth Care and Protection Act, the Adoption Act, Child Care Services Act, Youth Criminal Justice Act, and the Young Persons Offences Act. Mr. Speaker, in Budget 2014 some of the investments we are making, we are investing an additional \$308,000 to implement a new one-year mentoring team, as well as hire two new community service workers for the Innu zone; funding of \$200,000 to provide additional funding for travel to continue the newly implemented fly-in, fly-out approach, the Community of Natuashish Service Enhancement Program.

The department is also investing \$280,000 to purchase housing in Hopedale for social work staff; approximately \$1.5 million for an additional twenty new positions, including social work supervisors and social workers, to continue the implementation of the department's organizational model for the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services.

Mr. Speaker, the department is funding an additional \$500,000 for the Newfoundland and Labrador Foster Families Association to

strengthen the capacity and role of local associations across the Province. The total budget expenditure for the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services for the fiscal year is \$190,640,600.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let's take a closer look at some of the initiatives within the Department of Education. The Department of Education is responsible for the developing and administering a provincial system of education which encourages all students to achieve their potential development. It administers early learning opportunities for pre-school children and the primary, elementary, and secondary school system with programs sufficiently flexible to meet the individual needs and capabilities of all children. Specialized educational programs are provided for children with a disability who are unable to benefit from regular classroom instruction.

Mr. Speaker, the department is responsible for the provision of literacy, library and information services in the Province. Some of these achievements in education include: \$35.4 million for the introduction of full-day Kindergarten beginning in September 2016; \$30.6 million is provided over three years for infrastructure, as well as teaching and learning resources related to full-day Kindergarten, with ongoing costs expected to be well over \$13 million annually; \$4.8 million over three years to continue a focus on children from birth to age three and to build on previous investments.

Mr. Speaker, an investment of \$128.1 million for educational infrastructure continuing a historically unprecedented systematic investment in new schools, extensions, redevelopments, renovations and repairs, and maintenance; \$2.4 million on an annual basis to retain 28.5 teaching units, which were slated for removal due to an overall reduction in student population in our schools; there is funding for 43,000 additional student assistant hours at a cost of \$1 million; also, the continuation of no school fees and the free textbook policy in schools in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Mr. Speaker, when we look at the Department of Education, the total net expenditure for 2014-2015 is \$871,968,500.

We also met to discuss the Estimates of the Department of Health and Community Services whose mandate is for the overall direction of the Province's health and community services system, which provides services and programs aimed at the prevention of disease and the promotion, restoration, and maintenance of health and well-being. These goals are supported by the various programs of the department which include funding for the operation of hospitals, health care centres, long-term care facilities, and the provision of medical care, public health and other community services.

Some of the investments initiatives, Mr. Speaker, in Budget 2014 highlights \$2 million to increase capacity for autism assessment, and to reduce wait times for children with autism and other developmental conditions annualizing to \$3.9 million in 2015-2016; \$1.8 million to continue implementing the provincial wait-time strategy for hip and knee joint replacement; \$1.2 million to address the increased growth in hemodialysis in St. John's and in Stephenville; over \$700,000 to expand the Medical Transportation Assistance Program; \$350,000 to expand the provincial vaccination program including greater access to influenza vaccines, whooping cough vaccines for adults, and second dose chicken pox vaccine for children; over \$158,000 to expand the Newborn Screening Program to include cystic fibrosis; \$24 million to enhance cancer treatment, including \$7.1 million for coverage of new drug therapies under the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program; and \$712,000 for a smoking cessation program for eligible persons.

Last year, Mr. Speaker, Health and Community Services spent \$2,837,545,000. This year, the budget we adopted in Estimates will see the budget for Health and Community Services increase to an estimated expenditure of \$2,953,813,500.

Mr. Speaker, let me go on now to the Department of Justice. The Department of Justice provides legal services to government and is primarily responsible for the protection of citizens of the Province in respect to persons and their property. This objective is met by providing for police protection; the prosecution of alleged offenders; the operation of the court

and correctional systems for the Province; services to victims of crime; protection of human rights; and Legal Aid services. Drafting of legislation of the House of Assembly by the Office of the Legislative Counsel is also provided. In addition, Mr. Speaker, the department is responsible for the co-ordination of Access to Information and Protection of Privacy, the Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Division, the Support Enforcement Program, the Family Justice Services Division, Fines Administration, and the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.

Mr. Speaker, let me highlight some of the investments through Budget 2014 for the Department of Justice. There is \$9.2 million to strengthen policing services and enhanced recruitment, search and rescue, and the court system; including \$4.8 million in additional funding for police services, which, among other things, will be used to fund five new RCMP officers for Labrador, to increase Memorial University of Newfoundland's Police Studies Program class size, to enable the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary to add twenty new constables over the next three years, and additional funding for the Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit, Newfoundland and Labrador.

Also, Mr. Speaker, Budget 2014 saw an increase of \$116,000 to the annual grant provided to the Newfoundland and Labrador Search and Rescue Association for each of the next five years to be used to update vehicles and equipment, and also to be used for radio licensing fees.

Mr. Speaker, also Budget 2014 saw \$2.1 million for the Legal Aid system, and \$1.7 million for the Sherriff's Office to begin implementing recommendations of the external reviews that were commissioned in 2013, as announced on March 24, 2014.

Another initiative in Budget 2014, part of the Department of Justice, which I was very proud to be part of on April 14, along with my colleague, the MHA for the District of St. George's – Stephenville East, we were blessed to have the presence of the Premier to come to Stephenville and announce funding and the start of a brand new courthouse for the Stephenville, Bay St. George, Port au Port region. Mr.

Speaker, that was a very proud and defining moment for myself and the MHA for St. George's – Stephenville East. This year, Mr. Speaker, the Department of Justice will spend \$236,223,300 in the Department of Justice, as we brought forward in the Estimates.

The Department of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs has a mandate to support the financial stability and viability of municipalities, and the efficient and effective delivery of municipal services. The department, Mr. Speaker, assists municipalities in meeting their infrastructure needs, and provides financial and administrative tools to support sound municipal governance. The Fire and Emergency Services agency is responsible for the co-ordination of the overall services in Fire and Emergency Services. The department also leads the formulation of government's intergovernmental policies and strategies, and monitors and co-ordinates interdepartmental initiatives to ensure their consistent application.

Mr. Speaker, some of the highlights in the Department of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs through Budget 2014: a new three-year \$200 million Municipal Capital Works Program as announced on March 11, 2014, will fund high priority areas such as delivery of clean drinking water, as well as upgrades to roads and wastewater systems. As part of this program, approximately \$100 million is being allocated to the Province's seven largest municipalities. This takes into consideration prior levels of funding for municipal infrastructure and Municipal Operating Grants to ensure that their needs are being adequately addressed.

Mr. Speaker, another initiative of this government and highlighted in Budget 2014 will be \$4.5 million that is allocated for brand new fire trucks throughout municipalities and communities in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. This will include a one-time \$3 million increase in the funding over last year's total. This investment is to support and help our valuable and dedicated firefighters in the Province.

Mr. Speaker, total budget expenditure for the Department of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs in 2014-2015 is allocated at \$177,793,800. When we did the Estimates and

we went through the departments line by line, there were some policy questions asked by members of the Opposition. At the end of every session when we voted on it, there was unanimous support for the Estimates of the Budget. I am looking forward to unanimous support of the overall Budget that was brought forward in March of this year.

Mr. Speaker, *Budget 2014: Shared Prosperity, Fair Society, Balanced Outlook* will benefit the people and the communities that make up our Province with targeted expenditure in areas of health, education, child care, infrastructure, and economic development. To conclude my remarks on Budget Estimates Concurrence for this year, let me again say to the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador we have built a strong foundation. We will continue to make key investments for the people and in the people of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the privilege to speak to Concurrence tonight. I look forward to further debates on the Budget as we go through the session.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. JOYCE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just want to rise and have a few minutes to speak on the Budget and on the Estimates. I just heard the Member for Port au Port and, yes, there are a lot of good things in the Budget. I would never deny that. There are good things in the Budget. There are a lot of things that help a lot of people out in the Province. That is obvious and that is a positive thing. There is absolutely no doubt about it.

Mr. Speaker, the Estimates that were here tonight and the ones that I am going to be speaking about are Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs, Health and Community Services, and Education. I am just going to have a few words about each one and just pass on some of my concerns and highlights

that I have noticed during the Estimates, during the Budget Speech, and going through the Budget in discussions here in the House.

Mr. Speaker, I know sometimes that as a government you get so many asks, you get so many requests. I know they cannot all be met. I am 100 per cent confident that if someone had all the funds to give all the requests that are made to every department, it would be an ideal world. I know it is not an ideal world.

I look at the Minister of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs. In the Bay of Islands alone there is \$18 million worth of requests from the Bay of Islands. You just cannot fulfill that. No government can fulfill that. This is not being critical of the government if you do not get everything you ask. What you do ask for is to try to have some input to get the priorities.

As the member for the area you are in constant contact with the towns; you are speaking to the towns. You would like to be able to pass on the priorities of the towns, and also to be treated fairly, as we all expect to do and we are all going to fight to do. I understand politics. I understand at times there is a decision that may be made, and if they are of equal weight and both health and safety are taken care of, Mr. Speaker, I understand the politics of funding in government.

What we need to do is we need co-operation. You do not get that by us trying to just say everything the government is doing is bad, or any time we make a request or any time we make a suggestion that we are criticizing the government. Mr. Speaker, that is not the way it works.

I know I am not allowed to bring up some of the JCPs in the area. I am not allowed to bring them up, and do you know why? Because the minister here is around speaking to everybody and saying okay, here is the best we can do; what do you think? That is the way it should be. How can you argue with that, Mr. Speaker? How can you argue when the minister comes over to the Opposition and says okay, here is the money that is available; here is how I did it. Everybody is going to be treated the same. How can you argue with it?

You may not get everything you want. You may not get the projects you want, but you cannot argue about the process. You cannot argue about being treated fair. If you go back to your district with the JCPs and there are some that you cannot fulfill, you cannot go back and blame it on government. You have to say that is all the money that is there. That has been done before, Mr. Speaker.

To the minister, that is the way I have always said we should work. You may never get everything you want - there is no way you are going to get everything you want - but as long as you are treated fair, you can go back and you can justify it in your district. You can justify it to all the residents of the Bay of Islands if you are treated fair.

I said it from day one, I said it before and I know myself and the Minister of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs had a meeting with the Town of Lark Harbour and York Harbour this past Friday, we were very honest and we were very upfront.

The towns made a request and I informed the minister at the meeting. I said: Minister, I informed them that can never happen. They tried, and I said it in front of the group: This just cannot happen; it would be against all government policy. They said: We will try. We work well together.

Last night when I spoke, I mentioned how we dealt with the two towns. The two towns were very, very pleased, by the way. At least they got a proper hearing. They sat down. We will wait and see the outcome, but the towns were very pleased.

Mr. Speaker, I will just go through a few of the towns in the Bay of Islands and talk about some of the asks that they are looking for. As I just mentioned to the minister, we had the meeting with the Towns of Lark Harbour and York Harbour concerning amalgamation. I know Lark Harbour is looking for Phase 2 of water and sewer. York Harbour has not reached that stage yet. They are going to hopefully get a feasibility study - which is all part of the amalgamation - to see if it is feasible to run a water system off the Lark Harbour system or start their own system.

Mr. Speaker, also some of the concerns that they have are a new fire truck and upgrades to their fire hall and their town hall, especially if they amalgamate. There is very great co-operation with both towns now. There is a willingness by both towns to amalgamate. They are hoping they can work it out with the department. The towns are on side.

Those are some of the concerns that they have there, Mr. Speaker, and they were all raised with the minister last week. Hopefully, that is going to come. It will be great for both towns because they share the same church, the same fire department, and now the same Firettes. There are shared services there.

Then in Lark Harbour they have what they call the Outer Bay of Islands Enhancement Committee. Mr. Speaker, it is a group of volunteers who got together and are putting up a lot of climbing, a lot of hiking in the area. You can go to Blow-Me-Down Brook and you can go to Cedar Cove where you need ropes to get up. There are five or six great trails in that area.

They applied for a Community Enhancement Program also. Every year they get it and they upgrade and extend the trails, Mr. Speaker. It is great for tourism. When tourists come in the area they want to stay that extra night because of these hiking trails. A lot of this is done through government involvement and government help and assistance. They are very proud of their work. They should be proud of their work.

Mr. Speaker, I go to Humber Arm South. The major request in Humber Arm South is the water and sewer for Frenchman's Cove. That was committed years ago. It had to stop because of the funding. It is a little over \$1 million to finish it off. That is their priority.

They are also looking for some firefighting equipment because their town now is about twelve, fifteen kilometres long. They have a fish plant with 200-300 workers in it, Mr. Speaker. They have a school that the fire department is responsible for. That town has grown by leaps and bounds. They need fire protection equipment, and I know the application is in to the minister for that also. I know every town that puts a request in just cannot get everything they want. I understand

that. I understand that totally, Mr. Speaker, but, then again, it is my job to ensure that their request is being heard by the minister.

Mr. Speaker, they also put a grant in to the department. I am hoping also that their grant can be looked upon favourably, because they do a lot of work in the parks area. They do well with the Community Enhancement Program also. They did a lot of great work with that also.

I know they have an application in for the JCPs. They received one last year, Mr. Speaker. They received a JCP last year; they had a Come Home Year. What a celebration for a week. What a celebration in the Town of Humber Arm South for a week. They had runs out to Woods Island. They floated in a house. They made a house and floated it in as the people who moved off Woods Island did years and years ago. They re-enacted that. What a great time they had in the Town of Humber Arm South.

Mr. Speaker, we move up to Mount Moriah. They are looking also for an extension to the waterline and looking for a new fire hall as Mount Moriah has grown also. As the town has grown, so have the needs. These are all the requests that have gone in to the minister. A lot of these requests are what the town needs. There may be a little extra, but the majority of the requests are what the towns need to survive and to expand.

I understand again and I will repeat it again, you cannot get everything. It is my duty as the MHA to bring it up to the ministers: Here is a request for the towns; what can we do? How can we ensure they are getting their fair share? Mr. Speaker, if that is done, that is all we can do. That is all any of us could do.

I go over to the Town of Irishtown-Summerside, and I know the Minister of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs is listening attentively. There was a grant put in, I say to the minister, for an emergency grant. This is very important to the town. It was turned down, which is understandable. This is not a knock on the department. They were told to reapply under Capital Works, which they did. I think it was about \$75,000, Mr. Speaker. The \$75,000 is going to increase the booster on the water because the chlorination cannot get all the way

up the line to have clean, safe drinking water as the town expanded.

I know the minister is looking and I know he is listening. I just want to ensure that the minister is well aware of that one in the Town of Irishtown-Summerside because it is a water quality problem. It was \$75,000 which was the request. It was turned down, and I can understand. It was only another three to four months and Capital Works would be out and it would be done very quickly in the town because there are a few problems with the water. I just bring that up to the minister's attention because it is a serious issue to a lot of towns there, Mr. Speaker.

There is a sewer problem in Summerside. It is the lower end of Summerside, Mr. Speaker. It is on top of the hill, what they call the plant hill part. There is a major problem with the sewer. There is another part of the sewer, Summerside before they run into Meadows, it is a major problem with the sewer.

These are the types of sewer problems that over the years, Mr. Speaker, were not addressed that now we need to have addressed. Once again we cannot do it all overnight; we cannot do it all in one Budget. We may not do it all in two, or three, or four Budgets, but we have to set the priorities and we have to go and do it right. If we can see bit by bit improvements in water quality, of water and sewer, we can all stand up and say we are doing our job. We cannot do it all, but we can make a difference.

Mr. Speaker, I go on to Meadows. Meadows have, over the years, done well with the water and sewer. Meadows started earlier than most towns. Meadows did well with the water and sewer. Last year they got some money to pave some roads. This year they are also looking to pave some roads in the district. Once again it is coming up in Meadows firefighting equipment.

Mr. Speaker, Meadows now has a K-12 school. It is a big responsibility for the town. They had a new truck about three years ago, I think. Three or four years ago they received a new fire truck. They need the equipment for the volunteer firefighters to ensure that they have enough if there is ever a problem at the school. Like they say, there may never be one, but we as

firefighters have to be prepared. That is why there is firefighting equipment also. It was on the list last year for firefighting equipment for the Town of Meadows.

Another big thing – and I know the Minister of Tourism would be interested in this – they did a feasibility study on a ball field. I know the money is going to Capital Works and they did it. The request is in now for a softball field for the whole North Shore, regionalization for the North Shore. Years ago the North Shore had a great program in softball. It had a great high school program in softball, but now when they go practice softball they have to go to Corner Brook because they do not have a field. That is something again to the minister; I think last year there was money approved. They went out and did some soil testing and that is back. That is in Capital Works also. That fits right into the government's program of active living for the youth, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, Gillams also have some water and sewer issues. They have some problems with the roads. There is always an issue there. The former Minister of Education, I have to speak about him for a minute. There was an issue over on Gillams Road where they are trying to get a school bus to go up the road. I spoke to the minister and we wrote the minister. The minister said we cannot get involved but here is the way to go about it.

What we did is we met with the school board in Corner Brook and we met with the town council. I have to give the town council their due on the work that they did and I have to give the parents their due. They had to widen the road in certain areas and they had to go up and make a turnaround. The residents of Farm Road in Gillams, Mr. Speaker, went out with their power saws and cut down some blind spots. The town went in, they got a tractor and they leveled off the blind spots.

The Department of Education at the time put a few dollars in to help with the widening of one or two parts of the road and to take away the blind spot. Now there are over forty kids that the bus can go in over two kilometres, about a kilometre and a half, Mr. Speaker, to pick up the kids.

I just wanted to make sure the former minister – I think the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services now, I just wanted to recognize you for your assistance on that because the parents are very pleased that the kids do not have to walk out to the road. I just wanted to recognize that. That is a major improvement in there, and safety for the kids. Safety was the big thing. If you are coming out in the wintertime on those roads, a kilometre or a kilometre and a half, walking that far because the bus could not get in.

Also, Mr. Speaker, and the minister is well aware of this. The school board at the time got permission to buy a smaller bus to go in the road. They got permission from the Department of Education to buy a smaller bus so they could go in the road. I just wanted to thank the former minister, the school board, the parents, and the town council for their assistance and co-operation in that.

Mr. Speaker, we have McIver's, another town in the Bay of Islands that needs waterline extensions and an upgrade in their sanitary system. The Minister of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs with the CEP, they did a lot of great work with the town hall with that program. There are a lot of improvements to the town hall.

Then you go on to Cox's Cove, Mr. Speaker, where paving is a big issue. The former Minister of Municipal Affairs – there was a fire truck that was awarded last year to Cox's Cove. We were at the fireman's ball, the minister was invited out but he could not make it. I passed on his regrets that he could not make it. The tenders have been released for the new fire truck in Cox's Cove.

Mr. Speaker, why it is so important to have a fire truck, is Cox's Cove is on the end of Route 440. It is on the end. The closest place that can help them is McIver's. McIver's is a fair distance away with a fire truck to come down. So it is very important that Cox's Cove get a fire truck. The fire truck they had was about thirty years old. They had to get parts brought in from England. The need was recognized.

The firefighters at the fireman's ball asked me – I did forward it and I will say it publicly now. They want to thank the former minister for

coming out and making the announcement on the fire truck in the town hall with the residents, with the town. They wanted to say thank you for that because you took the time to come out and speak to them on that.

Mr. Speaker, I said it earlier, there is \$18 million worth of requests in the Bay of Islands. I do not expect all of that to be approved this year. It just cannot be done. It would not be logical to go to every town and say yes, you should get everything. It just should not happen, but as happened with the JCPs, it is a prime example of how you come over and say: Here is how I did it. Everybody in this House of Assembly is treated equally. If you have something to complain about you cannot go back to your district. Figure out what you want done. That is the best I can do because everybody is treated the same.

Someone like myself, or any other member on this side goes back to the district to say, there is stuff we cannot get approved but we have our fair share. How can we argue with that? We just cannot. We just cannot, and that is the way it should be, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to bring up Health and Community Services for a few minutes in the Estimates. I say to the minister, I do not know the short-term solution. The long-term, of course, is the long-term care facility they are going to build.

In the hospital now there are a lot of people who are in emergency rooms on stretchers. I do not know if there is a wing in the hospital we can open to alleviate, for the short-term, people on stretchers in the hallways. This is not being critical. This is absolutely not being critical. This is raising a concern that has been brought to my attention. I was involved with one or two patients personally.

I ask the Minister of Health and Community Services if he can contact the board and see if there is another wing we could open up for the short term. See if there is some way we can alleviate this problem, because when you get calls from people who are out in the hallways for seven or eight, or nine days – and I know the CEO, she is a great lady. She would do whatever she can for any person. I know that,

Mr. Speaker, but she can only work with the resources she has.

I ask the Minister of Health and Community Services if he would ask his officials to see if there is anything we can do in the short term to help out with the patient problem in Corner Brook.

Mr. Speaker, my time is up and I thank you for the time. I thank all ministers for their attention.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER (Verge): The hon. the Member for Baie Verte – Springdale.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. POLLARD: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is certainly a privilege and an honour for me to stand in this hon. House in Concurrence. First of all, I just want to say a great big thank you and a sincere thank you to the people from my district, the District of Baie Verte – Springdale for their ongoing support. Without them I would not be here tonight. I thank them for their support on a daily basis. As all MHAs, we are certainly taking our job seriously and we appreciate the support our constituents give us on a daily basis.

Before I get into the crux of what I want to talk about, Mr. Speaker, this being National Nurses Week, I would like to join the Minister of Health as well, a couple of days ago, by acknowledging and thanking all of our nurses out there, nurse practitioners, LPNs, and RNs for their outstanding, stellar, stupendous work that they do on a daily basis. I would like to thank them for their caring, heart, and the compassion they exhibit, that they display to all patients, and for their professionalism. We would like to thank them from the bottom of our hearts.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, this being graduation season, I just wanted to say a great big congratulations to the graduates from Indian River High School, Springdale, and the graduates from MSB Regional High School in Middle Arm. I attended both of these

graduations, and, Mr. Speaker, they did an outstanding job. The teachers, the parents, and the whole community support education wholeheartedly.

I also commend Valmont Academy. I was invited to their graduation, but due to the clash I could not attend both, so my assistant went there, Patrick Jim, and he told me they had a tremendous graduation as well. So hats off to all three schools, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to attending Cape John Collegiate graduation this Friday night coming. They always have a nice grad as well.

What are we doing right now, Mr. Speaker? For the purpose of the listeners and your audience out there, those people who are listening and glued to the TV at this very moment. When a standing committee has completed its review of the Estimates, the Chair of that committee reports to the House that the committee has approved the Estimates referred to it. A motion to concur in each committee report is now before this House. It is debated for up to a maximum of three hours. In essence, we get a total of nine hours to debate the Concurrence Motion – three hours per committee. So right now, as was pointed out earlier by previous speakers, we are debating the social services motion or Concurrence.

Mr. Speaker, when the Budget is delivered, there are three committees formed to discuss the Estimates. Now, I guess that is phraseology or terminology out there that probably a lot of people are not familiar with. What are we talking about when we refer to the word, Estimates? Well, Estimates are the proposed expenditures for government departments and agencies, as well as the Legislature, by the way, for the upcoming fiscal year, tabled as part of the annual Budget process, Mr. Speaker.

For your information, there are three Committees formulated: the Resource Committee, which is Chaired by the Member for Exploits; the Government Services Committee that was Chaired by the Member for Conception Bay East – Bell Island, and there is also a third Committee, the Social Services Committee, which was chaired by the Member for Port de Grave. All three Chairs did an outstanding job,

Mr. Speaker. Each Committee, I do believe, consists of six members.

You might ask: What is the purpose of each Committee?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. POLLARD: The purpose of each Committee is to discuss the proposed expenditures for the upcoming year and compare previous years as well. There is basically a three-week schedule whereby the Committees will meet in the morning from 9:00 to about noon hour and also at 6:00 p.m. to about 9:00 p.m.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MR. POLLARD: Sometimes, Mr. Speaker, should other members request and want longer time, the ministers and the department officials oblige that request and they will have probably another session, but they do not have to.

It is an opportunity for the Committee members to probe the department officials and the minister to get answers as to why the money is spent, where the money is spent, and where it goes. Basically, it is an opportunity where we are educated of what services are offered and what programs are offered as well.

It is an opportunity or a process whereby I suppose we call it – we get deep in the bowels of each department. Sometimes officials, ministers, and the staff are all held accountable. There is nothing wrong with that, Mr. Speaker. Everybody asks questions and they want to know where the money goes and the expenditures.

It is a tedious process, Mr. Speaker, that enables the minister and department officials to answer questions as basically the minister, his officials, and staff are really on the hot seat. I must say it is a very good exercise and it is very educational as well. Last year, I believe I can remember I went to every session just to educate myself who the deputy ministers were, who the ADMs were,

who the staff members were, and who the ministers were of each department because things change from time to time. I must say it was very educational.

I also commend each minister and the department officials for their stellar job. They were willing to answer all kinds of questions, Mr. Speaker. The officials also, the staff members of each department, displayed a very in-depth knowledge and professionalism as they articulated their responses. I would also like to commend each Committee member for their diligent work as well.

I was a member of the Social Services Committee. The other members of the Social Services Committee include: Chairperson, the Member for Port de Grave; the Member for Port au Port; the Member for St. John's North; the Member for Bonavista South; and the Member for St. John's Centre. Mr. Speaker, each Committee is comprised of members from all parties, so I suppose we can call it an all-party committee.

Mr. Speaker, under the social services sector here are the following departments that we had to examine and ask questions: the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services; the Department of Education; the Department of Health and Community Services; the Department of Justice; the Department of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs; and the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation.

What I want to do now, Mr. Speaker, is to examine the proposed expenditure of each department. First of all, let's examine the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services; \$204,185,000 was the expenditures, representing 2.6 per cent of the expenditures. The Department of Education saw \$876,163,000; 11 per cent of the expenditures, Mr. Speaker. The Department of Health and Community Services was \$2,988,620,000. In other words, it was almost \$3 billion; 37.6 per cent of the expenditures. The Department of Justice expenditures were \$249,587,000, which represented 3.1 per cent of the expenditures. The Department of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs was \$266,350,000. In other words, it was 3.3 per cent of the

expenditures. The Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation was \$41,495,000; 0.5 per cent of expenditures.

Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that all of these departments combined yielded a grand total, under the social sector, of 58 per cent of expenditures. Just for your curiosity, the resource sector was 22.6 per cent approximately and the government services was approximately 19.3 per cent. These were the expenditures of the social services.

Mr. Speaker, for a couple of minutes I would also like to get into probably what we call a mandate, a mission, or the objective of each department. I will read it to you briefly, just to give those people who are watching by TV out there some idea of what each department is responsible for.

First of all, I will go with Health and Community Services. The Department of Health and Community Services is responsible for the overall direction of the Province's health and community services system, which provides services and programs aimed at the prevention of disease and the promotion, restoration and maintenance of health and well-being. These goals are supported by various programs of the department, which include funding for the operation of hospitals, health care centres, long-term care facilities and the provision of medical care, public health and other community services.

With respect to Child, Youth and Family Services, the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services is responsible for the planning and the development of policies, standards and programs, as well as service delivery, to help ensure the safety and well-being of children and youth in Newfoundland and Labrador. The legislative framework which governs the provision of services for children, youth and families in this Province includes: Children and Youth Care and Protection Act, the Adoption Act, the Child Care Services Act, Youth Criminal Justice Act, and the Young Persons Offences Act.

With respect to the Education department, Mr. Speaker, here is the mandate, the objective, or the mission of that department, briefly. The

Department of Education is responsible for developing and administering a provincial system of education which encourages all students to achieve their maximum potential development. It administers early learning opportunities for preschool children and the primary, elementary, and secondary school system, with programs sufficiently flexible to meet the individual needs and capabilities of all children. Specialized educational programs are provided for disabled children who are unable to benefit from regular classroom instruction. The department is responsible for the provision of literacy, library, and information services in the Province.

With respect to Justice, Mr. Speaker, the Department of Justice provides legal services to government and is primarily responsible for the protection of residents of the Province with respect to their persons and their property. This objective is met by providing legal advice to all departments of government; providing for police protection; the prosecution of accused persons; the administration of the courts and operation of the Province's correctional systems; services to victims of crime; protection of human rights; and Legal Aid services. Drafting of legislation for the House of Assembly by the Office of the Legislative Counsel is also provided. In addition, the department is responsible for the Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Division, the Support Enforcement Program, the Family Justice Services Division, Fines Administration, and the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.

With respect to Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs, the Department of Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs supports the financial stability and viability of the municipalities and the efficient and effective delivery of municipal services right across the Province. It assists municipalities in meeting their infrastructure needs and provides financial and administrative tools to support sound municipal governance.

These goals are achieved through programs aimed at strengthening local governance, providing operational support, administering grants and subsidies for community infrastructure, and providing technical, financial, and land-use planning and support for the development of municipal infrastructure. The

department leads the formulation of government's intergovernmental policies and strategies, and monitors and co-ordinates interdepartmental initiatives to ensure their consistent application. The Fire and Emergency Services agency is responsible for co-ordinating overall provincial efforts in areas of fire and emergency services.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, in keeping with a social housing plan for Newfoundland and Labrador, the strategic directions for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation include working with partners so that housing assistance is part of an integrated approach to well-being and community building, allocating resources to assist those with the greatest housing need, and providing housing assistance that is responsive to client needs. In response, Newfoundland and Labrador Housing goals and objectives for 2014-2015 address changing housing needs among low- and moderate-income households right across the Province.

Mr. Speaker, that concludes the explanation of the mandate, the mission, or the objective of each department. I would just like to zero in on for a few moments I have left talking about investments in child care under the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services.

As you know, our government is certainly committed to enhancing the accessibility, affordability, and the quality of regulated child care services right across this great Province of ours. Budget 2014 is no exception. An additional \$11.4 million was given to this department bringing the total budget to approximately \$42.5 million. That budget is served to implement our 10-Year Child Care Strategy, entitled: Caring for our Future: Provincial Strategy for Quality, Sufficient and Affordable Child Care in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, there are seven key investments that are part of this strategy, which I would like to outline very briefly and the monetary figure on each one. Number one, Child Care Services Subsidy; there is \$15.7 million to assist eligible families with child care rates in a licensed child care centre or regulated family care home

through the Child Care Services Subsidy. Number two, the operating grant program; there is \$9.7 million to implement a new voluntary operating grant program to provide funding to eligible child care centres that set child care rates at the provincial subsidy rate and meet program criteria.

Investment number three: Early Learning and Child Care Supplement; there is \$6.1 million for qualified Level 1 early childhood educators working directly with children in a homeroom to receive a total annual supplement of \$6,660, and Level 2 program operators to receive a total annual supplement of \$10,000.

Investment number four, Mr. Speaker, Child Care Capacity Initiative, which sees \$1.8 million to provide start-up grants for non-profit, community-based organizations offering regulated child care services through the Child Care Capacity Initiative. Investment number five, Inclusion Supports Program; \$1.8 million for the Inclusion Supports Program to provide additional staff or funded spaces to accommodate all children in regular child care programming.

Investment number six, Family Child Care Initiative; \$1 million for the Family Child Care Initiative that provides regulated child care spaces with an emphasis on spaces for infants, as well as an opportunity for individuals to enter and remain in the labour force, either by becoming a regulated family care provider or by availing of the regulated family care spaces.

Investment number seven, Workplace Training Program; there is \$500,000 set aside to commence a Workplace Training Program that will include prior learning and assessment and recognition to support early childhood educators upgrading their qualifications.

Now, Mr. Speaker, in the remaining time I have left, I would just like to go back and refer to the initiative number four, the Child Care Capacity Initiative. I would like to thank the former minister, by the way, the Minister of Child, Youth and Family Services at the time, who came to Springdale about a couple of weeks ago, and during his visit to the Training Wheels Family Resource Program in Springdale he announced approximately \$164,000 under this

initiative to help strengthen child care services in Green Bay South, Springdale area, Baie Verte, and west of the Province in Lourdes. The Training Wheels Family Resource Program will receive approximately \$14,000 to further explore child care opportunities, with the aim of creating new regulated child care spaces in the area of Green Bay South and additional spaces in the Town of Springdale.

I would also like to point out, Mr. Speaker, that the Baie Verte Peninsula Family Resource Program received the bulk of that, the amount of \$148,000 approximately, to support the expansion of the existing regulated child care centre in Baie Verte to create an additional twenty-four school aged spaces. That is great, Mr. Speaker, for that area. I am sure they appreciate that.

In conclusion, to date, our provincial government has invested over \$294,700 to assist this particular facility, the Baie Verte Peninsula Family Resource Program, with providing child care services in that particular community.

With that being said, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my remarks at this time.

Thank you very much.

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

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

I am very happy to stand and to speak at Concurrence. I want to thank all the staff from the various departments who appeared for Committee Estimates during social services. It was a great experience. It is always wonderful to meet staff who have worked so hard to make the departments that they work in, work the way they should work, and also to see staff who work so hard to serve the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The wonderful thing is we have staff who have been at it for a long time and we also have younger, newer staff as well. It is great to see that mix and it is great to be able to hear some of the successes but also while looking at Estimates and looking at budgets and line by line items, to

see some of the challenges that are faced. The challenges that are faced by the staff who are working in the departments and the challenges then that affect the daily lives of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Our social services are all about meeting the needs of our people so that everybody can thrive. Oftentimes, the needs are great. Not necessarily because of any deficiency on behalf of our people, but it is about how we live as a society and it is about how we take care of one another. It is about how we can all participate in our communities to the fullest of our ability. Our social services should not just be about emergencies and Band-Aids. In fact, it is about how we honour each other. It is about how we respect each other, and it is how we make sure that we all have our basic needs met.

Justice is wrapped up in social services as well, Mr. Speaker. It is about how we agree to share our fantastic wonderful Province with one another and how we share our resources with one another. It is about education and housing, the needs of our children present and future, the needs of our seniors, the needs of those who are physically unwell, and the needs of those who need jobs. It is about all those wonderful things that make up a community, that make up a thriving community, and that make up a community that is living in prosperity.

One thing I would like to point out, Mr. Speaker, it is also about fairness. In Newfoundland and Labrador, for the most part we are a people who are fair. We are fair to one another. We are a people who come from a tradition of sharing. Whether it was in the fishery or in forestry, people helped build each other's houses. People made sure that everybody in the community had enough to eat, whether it is by sharing fish, sharing moose, sharing a garden.

We took care of our elderly. We took care of our sick. It is what we do, and it is what a prosperous society does. It may be a little more sophisticated, complicated, complex, and formalized now, but it is basically about the way that we live together, the way that we see our present, and it is a way that we look towards our future.

We are a have Province. Our current Premier, in the previous Budget to this, talked about the golden age we are in, so that we are again in a time of historic prosperity. That prosperity is a result of our natural resources, whether it is fishery or mining, forestry or oil. It is also based on people's hard work, on people's labour, the sweat of people's brow, and on people's expertise. It is also based on not only the large multinational corporations that come in and work with the Province to exploit our natural resources so that the Province as well can make some profits, but that the Province also benefits from that.

Are they benefiting the most? I am not so sure. That is something that needs to be debated as well. It is also the small businesses because we know that small business is the backbone. Mr. Speaker, the small businesses and economic diversity within regions of the Province are the backbone of our economy and the backbone of our prosperity. Because of our prosperity and the fact that we are a have Province, there are many benefits of that but there are also some very difficult challenges that many people experience because of our prosperity.

There are negative effects for some people. We do not all benefit the same way and that is probably not possible, but some of us are harder hit. Some people in the Province are harder hit by some of the negative effects of prosperity. What we need to be able to do in order to be fair – because that is what we want to do, that comes from our cultural reality to be fair – is that we have to mitigate some of the economic challenges that people are facing because of our prosperity.

We are a have Province. We are a have Province with incredible potential. The role of government is to make sure to maximize that potential so that everybody can thrive, so that everybody can participate. In this Budget, Mr. Speaker, I do believe there are some positive things that will help people to fully participate in our communities and be able to thrive; however, there are some big gaps as well.

One of the problems is we do not have in many areas – and I will get to that – overarching strategies, overarching policies, but what we see more so is a piece of this and a piece of that

where people have to scramble then. It could be different. We are 500,000 people in a time of prosperity. We can afford to be leaders in our social services. I would like to talk about some of those, Mr. Speaker.

In the whole realm of social policy we could be leaders. It is not about spending uncontrollably. It is about wise investment; wise investment in our people. Wise investment in our communities so that people can fully participate, so that they can be making money, so that their families can be taken care of. For those who cannot participate in that way, to make sure they have security of person so that people can get on with their lives.

I would like to look at child care. Child care is a great underpinning in foundation. The government has said they have invested money in child care, but the problem is we all know, particularly the people in Labrador who live adjacent to Quebec, they see what happens with their Quebec neighbours. They have child care, fully accessible early childhood development, and fantastic learning opportunities for children for \$7 to \$8 a day for everyone. Why can we not have that, Mr. Speaker? I believe we can have that. Studies have shown that yes, indeed, we can have that. That is about investment.

Although the government is talking about the great amounts of money they are putting into child care, it still leaves people scrambling. It leaves people scrambling because young working families still have to pay \$800 to \$1,000 a month per child. It does not have to be that way.

Mr. Speaker, it is sort of like, if we decided in our roads and in our highways that everybody was going to be given a little bit of money and they are responsible for their piece of road that they got the money for, rather than putting all our money together, like we do with roads, so that we can ensure we have a viable, safe, and top of the line roadway system. That is what we need to do with our child care. It is in pieces. Rather than having a full, universal, accessible child care program under our educational system, we end up with pieces here and pieces there and people still scrambling.

I insist, Mr. Speaker, and I am sure everybody in this House does, that the face of a prosperous, modern society is not one where people have to scramble to try and get their needs met so that they can fully participate in the economy and the well-being of their communities.

Housing is a huge issue, Mr. Speaker. In this Budget, there has been very little set aside for housing that takes us from the status quo. As a matter of fact, we do not even have a status quo in housing. What we have is we see we are losing; we are actually losing in our housing issues. We are in a housing crisis almost throughout the Province.

The mayors of towns and cities all over the Province are using the terminology that we are in a housing crisis. The housing crisis affects different people in different ways. We can see people who have very complex needs, whether they have mental health problems or addictions problems and may have to live on Income Support, they cannot find adequate safe housing. When we have seniors who are seeing their incomes, because of the increases in the cost of living, diminish. They are having a hard time with housing.

We see young working families who may have child care costs of \$800 to \$1,000 per child per month, plus student loan costs, plus maybe a car payment, and then on top of that really expensive housing costs. They are getting creamed, Mr. Speaker, because it is coming at them from all areas.

The City of St. John's has developed a very interesting project. They have taken some leadership in the whole area of housing. They have started a housing program to help working families buy their own homes. This is something that this government promised in their Blue Book; they promised it. We have not seen hide or tail of it in the last Budget or in this Budget or in the Budget before, although they promised there would be a home ownership program to help working families buy a home.

We all know how important it is to be able to buy a home. It builds up family wealth. It builds up equity for the family. That is a really important thing because it stabilizes housing for working families.

The City of St. John's has taken land that belongs to the city and they have done a special tax incentive. They have put out a Request for Proposals for developers to work with them, to have the city work with them, developers to work with the city – so private enterprise and the municipal government to work together to make it possible for young families to buy houses. That is leadership, Mr. Speaker.

One would hope that would have been in this Budget. It is not. What the government did is they have invested more money in the REEP, but in fact that is not even the status quo. It brings us up to what we were the year before last, not last year, because last year they cut it in half. This money does not even give us the status quo, because the money – everything costs more. We are not even holding our ground, it is actually going backwards. This government is losing ground in the area of housing.

There are a few more rent subs to help people who are really caught in the crunch. A lot of single people in major towns and cities in the Province cannot afford rent, they cannot afford housing. They have over 30 per cent of their income on shelter.

The City of St. John's – and I know of other municipalities as well in the Province that are looking at similar programs where they are looking at the land they have, they are looking at tax incentives, and they are trying to work with private developers to build more affordable housing. Why cannot this government do that? We are in a time of prosperity, we can do it. We are 500,000 people. We have so many resources, and among the resources we have is land. This government controls a lot of land that is underutilized that can be used in projects like this.

I believe every member of this House wants to ensure that everybody in Newfoundland and Labrador has a safe affordable roof over their heads. Everybody in this Chamber wants that. Why can't this government take that leadership?

I would hope this government is going to take that leadership. I know they have hired somebody to do policy and research in housing, but we have not seen anything reflected of that

work in this Budget. I would hope the Minister Responsible for Housing will seriously look at that and take some leadership and take some risks.

My goodness, we can take risks. We are in that time of prosperity, we have 500,000 people. We can take risks. We can be innovative, but we are not even being forward thinking. In fact, what is happening is we are not even holding the status quo. We are losing ground, particularly in the area of housing.

Part of housing also is energy efficiency. Energy efficiency is not just about telling people not to use energy. It is not about denying people. It is about actually creating energy by not using so much. It is actually producing energy for what we really do need to use it for.

Newfoundland and Labrador was the only Province that did not participate in the energy efficiency study in the Atlantic energy project that involved the Atlantic Provinces and New England. It was an economic study. Newfoundland and Labrador was the only Province that did not participate in that. I think that is a shame.

I think we can be innovative. I think we can be leaders in this area. It is doable. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have always been innovative people. We have always found ways to support ourselves. We have always found ways to work well with the natural resources that we have.

Vermont has a state energy company that is all about efficiency. It has not produced any energy. In fact, what it is doing with energy efficiency programs is reducing the need and the use of electricity in residential homes and also in commercial buildings. By cutting back on the need, they are actually making more energy available.

Co-op housing, seniors housing, Aboriginal housing – because the federal government is pulling back from housing, they still do not have a national housing strategy, we are feeling those ill effects here in the Province. The Province has to step up by pushing the federal government to have a full-fledged national housing strategy and we need a provincial

housing strategy. We need the Province to take that initiative and that leadership.

We are starting to lose some of our social housing. We are seeing some of our social housing units disappear because of the pull back from the federal government, and because some of the federal government housing commitments to social housing have expired. We see that some of our existing housing units are falling into disrepair and are not being repaired.

In my District of St. John's Centre alone, in Buckmaster's Circle a number of units have been torn down and there is no plan to replace them. A number of units are boarded up. We all see that. All of us in this House in our own districts see houses that are boarded up that belong to Newfoundland and Labrador Housing.

We are not even holding the status quo. We are losing ground. Mr. Speaker, that is not the face of a prosperous society. We can do better. With our prosperity and with a political will, we can do better. I think an ideal step would be for this government to call an all-party standing committee on the housing crisis where we can all look at it together, where we can have experts present. There are a lot of experts in the Province who are working on the issue of housing and who are working on the whole issue of homelessness. We can also call in experts from all over the country.

Mr. Speaker, that is what we need to be doing right now; we need to be not a government and a people who are losing ground, but what we need to be is leaders. We can take those risks. We are at a time in our history with historic prosperity, with 500,000 people, with people who are willing to take risks. We can do it. We can do better. That is what we miss in this Budget. That is what we have uncovered in Concurrence, the line by line items.

Mr. Speaker, what we see are missed opportunities, which I think is a shame in this day and age to have missed opportunities in these areas because there is so much potential. Let us not rest on missed opportunities but actually push to maximize our potential.

Mr. Speaker, I see my time is up. I look forward to standing again and speaking on more issues for Concurrence.

Thank you.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a pleasure to stand again in this House of Assembly to speak on Concurrence and the Estimates Committee. I was informed by participating in the Estimates Committees that I have attended, Mr. Speaker. This was also my third year participating in the Estimates Committees. It is a great learning experience.

I paid close attention, listened, communicated, and got a better understanding of how all the different departments function and the funding that goes into each and every department that I participated in at the Estimates Committee. It is all about the social services sector. Those are the type of Committees that I participated in as a Member of the House of Assembly, Committees such as: Education, Health and Community Services, Justice, Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs, the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation, Child, Youth and Family Services, and the Labour Relations Agency. All of those departments and bodies of government are very important to all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, Mr. Speaker.

I listened attentively to the previous speaker from St. John's Centre. I listened to some of the comments in relation to no leadership on this side of the House. Since I have been a Member of the House of Assembly representing the District of Bonavista South I can say that I looked up to a number of strong leaders on this side of the House in different ministerial departments of this great government, Mr. Speaker. One in particular, the Member for Gander –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLE: – was Responsible for Advanced Education and Skills, Responsible for Municipal Affairs, and Responsible for Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation. I am going to touch on some of the commitments that this government provided to people all across this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador in Budget 2014.

I guess the people of the Province will decide who is telling the truth at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker. The people on this side of the House have nothing to hide. We are transparent, we listen to the people, and we turn what the people are saying into action. We have proven that time over time over time.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLE: Our government supports the most vulnerable people in our society, Mr. Speaker; \$170 million for the Poverty Reduction Strategy, a total investment of \$1 billion since 2006.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLE: This government supports – in light of what the Member for St. John's Centre had to say – affordable housing. We are addressing homelessness, Mr. Speaker. I am going to identify areas to back up with facts what I am saying here tonight. I did not intend to speak on this specific issue, but I have no other choice but to stand in this House and counteract what was said in this House tonight.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLE: If anyone wants to get up and rebut what I am saying, feel free to do so after, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLE: Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and this provincial government, Mr. Speaker, will again partner with the Government of Canada to extend the investment in the Affordable Housing Agreement for an unprecedented five years. A \$68 million agreement also extends to the Provincial Home Repair Program and assesses 2,100 households with low incomes to repair their homes. That is

an unprecedented amount of help to the people of this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, the most vulnerable in some cases.

These are the facts. I am going to keep rolling out the facts as I speak here tonight, Mr. Speaker; \$12 million over three years to extend the Residential Energy Efficiency Program to assist up to 1,000 low-income homeowners per year to energy retrofit their homes. That is an unprecedented number. There is \$1 million to increase the Rent Supplement Program, bringing the current \$8 million annual allocation to \$9 million. That is an increase of \$1 million in that program.

We do not show any leadership on this side of the House? I sat attentively for three years in this House of Assembly listening to the negativity coming from the opposite side. I feel tonight that I have an obligation on behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador to stand in this House and put the facts out there on behalf of this government.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLE: The government of the day is doing so much with programs and listening to what the people are saying. We will continue to listen to what the people are saying, Mr. Speaker.

Can we be everything to everyone? I am going to be honest; no, we cannot. We make decisions. We make decisions based on what the people are telling us, based on community groups, and based on community leaders. We take what we are hearing and actually roll out in a fair, equitable manner, Mr. Speaker. This is what this government is doing on this side of the House.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLE: Five hundred thousand dollars in additional funding for the Supportive Living Program, for a total annual investment of \$5.3 million to address homelessness, Mr. Speaker, in this Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLE: To say that we are not doing anything and we are not showing leadership on this side of the House is somewhat shameful, Mr. Speaker. It is shameful.

Nine million dollars over three years to extend the Home Modification Program –

AN HON. MEMBER: How much?

MR. LITTLE: Nine million dollars over three years to extend the Home Modification Program to provide financial assistance to homeowners with disabilities or seniors with low to moderate incomes who require accessibility changes to their residence.

Mr. Speaker, I know for a fact in my district, the beautiful historic District of Bonavista South, there are people who actually applied for some of those programs and are delighted that programs like those are initiated by the Province, by this Government of Newfoundland and Labrador today. We will continue to provide those programs, Mr. Speaker.

AN HON. MEMBER: That we will.

MR. LITTLE: We will. There is \$100,000 for the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Community Centre Summer Employment Program. Mr. Speaker, there are a wide variety of programs. That is another great program that this government continues to roll out and do on a regular basis.

We are looking at all areas of the Province. This Province is a large geographical area, a Province with all kinds of infrastructure, all kinds of hospitals, nursing homes, and roadwork. We look at each and every area of the Province and on an equitable, fair basis we roll out funding on an annual basis to the communities of Newfoundland and Labrador. We will continue to do that.

Supports for health and wellness, there is \$6.7 million for the continuation of the Adult Dental Program, which is very important to all of our people across this wonderful Province of

Newfoundland and Labrador, services from \$150 and sometimes up to \$200 on an annual basis. There is \$700,000 to extend drug card coverage under the Prescription Drug Program, from six months to one year for low-income residents when entering the workforce, Mr. Speaker.

This government continues to support our children, our youth, and families, Mr. Speaker, right across this great Province. There is approximately \$1.5 million for an additional twenty positions –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER (Littlejohn): Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Bonavista South.

MR. LITTLE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for protecting me and allowing me to speak with my twenty minutes that I have. I will continue on. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

There is approximately \$1.5 million for an additional twenty new positions, including social worker supervisors and social workers, to continue the implementation of the department's organizational model for the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services.

Mr. Speaker, Health and Community Services – as a Member of the House of Assembly, I looked up to the previous Minister of Health and Community Services who has done an outstanding job –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLE: – and many times I actually consulted, I got really good information and facts from the minister that I could take back to my district and inform some of my constituents. The previous, and I am sure the new Minister of Health and Community Services is certainly going to do an outstanding job as well because he is another great leader on this side of the House.

When somebody criticizes and says there is no leadership on this side of the House, I know the difference because I am sitting on this side of the House. I know the programs. I know how

essential it is to continue to provide great programs for the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

What a great government to be part of, Mr. Speaker. What a great learning experience for a new MHA to come into this House of Assembly, to have the experience here sitting on this side of the House and making some great decisions day after day in this great House of Assembly.

A \$3 billion budget in health care for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians spread out right across the large, vast, geographical area of this Province, Mr. Speaker; a Province with a population of a little over 500,000 people and a large, vast geographical area, the great Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We will continue to provide and invest to help ensure better health care, better care and better value for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in the future, Mr. Speaker. We are listening to the people of this great Province. We are focusing on areas we know which mean the best and mean the most to people and their families, their children, their grandparents, and so forth.

This is what a good government should do: listen to the people, continue to be fair, roll out programs, and roll out the dough right across the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. That is what we are doing, and we are going to continue to do that as leaders, as the elected government right now. We are going to continue to do that, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLE: Our investment in health care is significant, and we are going to spend responsibly. There are times I sat on this side of the House and I heard the Opposition say: spend, spend, and spend. There are other times I am hearing the Opposition say: cut, cut, cut, or balanced Budget, balanced deficit.

What do you want? We are responsible as a government. We are fiscally responsible and we are very fair to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We will continue, as leaders in this Province, to be fair to the people of this great Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I can guarantee you that when I had discussions with the previous Minister of Health and Community Services, with department officials, and with Eastern Health on dialysis – and as the dialysis committee did, from the great Town of Bonavista, came to St. John's, had an open dialogue and met with the minister on a number of occasions, and \$1.5 million was announced in Budget 2014 for a new hemodialysis unit for Bonavista.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLE: Mr. Speaker, the people on the tip of the Bonavista Peninsula were delighted with such a great announcement: an announcement that will certainly improve the quality of health care, and improve the quality of life for the people who will have to use dialysis in the future.

In addition to that, as we speak, in October there is going to be a new bungalow style long-term care facility open in the Town of Bonavista, in the District of Bonavista South.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. LITTLE: What an accomplishment in such a short time, Mr. Speaker. I am delighted to be part of this great government to know that this government is rolling out the dough all over the Province, the wealth. We are going to continue to do it. As a government, we are going to continue to do that. We are going to continue to be fair to the people of this Province. We are going to do it all over the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, in each and every community.

AN HON. MEMBER: Even the Opposition.

MR. LITTLE: Even the Opposition, Mr. Speaker, in light of some comments that were made earlier today in this House.

The provincial government is providing significant funding for long-term care and community support services with an investment of \$61 million in new funding this year. This year a total of \$695 million will be invested for the provision of long-term care and community support services.

Mr. Speaker, I can go on and on and on speaking on Health and Community Services, but now I am going to shift. I am going to take it to the Minister Responsible for Municipal and Intergovernmental Affairs. A new minister, a minister who is certainly doing a wonderful job on behalf of the people of this great Province and how important it is to have a government that is actually consulting, working with municipalities all over this great Province, building bridges, roads, and water and sewer projects. Quality water is a very important topic and will continue to be an important topic in the future.

Fire and Emergency Services – municipal capital works projects are being rolled out, Mr. Speaker, as we speak. I know how important Municipal Capital Works Programs are for municipalities. I served on a municipality for fourteen years and the cost-shared agreements certainly helps municipalities survive in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. It is a great initiative by this government.

The Community Sector Council is a big part of what is happening in pilot projects in different areas in the Province. A large number of volunteers in my district are actually participating as volunteers. I would like to commend the great volunteers of this Province, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much for having the time to speak tonight.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. KIRBY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is an honour and a privilege for me to have an opportunity to speak to the Concurrence Motion on the social sector committee. I attended the Education Estimates in that Committee. It is all very well run, I thought. There were some interesting questions and I will get to some of that.

I will primarily limit my remarks to the Department of Education, but I wanted to relate something that happened last night that I think it

is important. Members talk about rolling out the dough, I thought he said; there is one area at least I think a bit more dough could be rolled out in. I got a message last night from one of my constituents whose mother was in the Health Sciences Centre. She went to the Health Sciences to emergency on Sunday afternoon and at some point that night was wheeled up to a ward and was in the hallway of that ward without a room, without the privacy that comes with that, in a hallway in the Health Sciences from Sunday night up until sometime this afternoon.

I thank the Minister of Health and Community Services; I brought this to his attention at my earliest opportunity and I am not sure what happened, but I know that thank goodness she is finally in a room. One thing I was surprised at: I was having some back and forth with people on social media, on Twitter and Facebook, about this state of affairs with health care and low and behold, so many people out there had comparable experiences. They themselves, their mother, their father, or one of their relatives also had the experience of spending an extended period of time, a number of days, in the hallway of a hospital in this Province waiting to get proper care.

I think it is an ultimate indignity, Mr. Speaker, when you are in pain and out of your home, through no fault of your own, sick, to be in the hallway in a hospital with very little privacy. I was taken aback by that. Rather than having that be the new normal, maybe we could roll out a bit of dough in that area, I say to the Member for Bonavista South.

Now, on to Education – I will not name the school, but there was a school council meeting here on the Northeast Avalon last night and it really goes right back to what I was saying the last time I spoke to the Budget about the overcrowding problem we have on the Northeast Avalon with our schools. Whether it is Mount Pearl or Paradise, Goulds or St. John's, Portugal Cove-St. Phillips or Torbay, CBS or what have you, we have significant overcrowding problems in our schools.

I got a couple of e-mails from parents today – I know the Minister of Education did as well – talking about one issue with respect to portables.

This school has been waiting for portables and it taken basically a year to get portables in there. There is going to be an additional portable added, but that portable, that modular classroom, is going to have to go where the playground currently stands. The playground is there through the hard work of the parents in that community who raised \$50,000 to have all of the landscaping done and the playground equipment added there.

They are going to basically lose, or who knows, relocate – plans are not decided yet – this \$50,000 playground. Kids may not even have a playground next year because there needs to be a modular. It already goes back to the fact that the school is too small and there has been nothing done to date and it is clearly going to take another number of years before there is another school facility built to accommodate those students. I think that is terrible.

To make matters worse, the government has now brought out an election promise for full-day Kindergarten in this Budget, that it will at some point in future introduce full-day Kindergarten; but in schools where there is overcrowding we are hearing now that administrators of the schools are saying we are not going to have full-day Kindergarten in this school because we just do not have any room for it. They just do not have any room for full-day Kindergarten in those schools.

It is all well and good to promise it, you are going to do it and all of that, but where you have a situation where you have to get rid of the playground to accommodate another modular – that is not going to come onsite for another year because it took a year to get two modulars there this year – it just defies reason, really.

That is going on out there while we are talking about making improvements and government is making promises about new builds, new school facilities, and full-day Kindergarten.

Meanwhile, we are getting pretty solid evidence and feedback from our communities telling us that we have insufficient facilities and full-day Kindergarten is not going to be a reality as soon as we think for some of these schools unless something drastic happens, and I am not sure what that is.

I also wanted to talk a little bit about Mental Health Week. Last week was Mental Health Week, and I took the opportunity to again point out that parents, students, educators, school staff, administrators, have been telling us that we have some critical mental health issues in our schools, ones that need to be addressed.

In this year's pre-Budget consultations, the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils had made a couple of different recommendations around that. The addition of youth mental health and addictions counsellors was one suggestion, and the reduction of the ratio for guidance counsellors. That is, in part, to reflect the expanded role and responsibilities of guidance counsellors in our schools.

We know from talking to teachers, from talking to guidance staff – I know there was a meeting of guidance staff in St. John's this week talking about a number of issues. There is professional development going on, an in-service this week and next talking about the Safe and Caring Schools Policy, the Department of Education's new assessment policies and so on.

Those people are certainly well aware that we have increasingly seen students suffering from mental health issues and illnesses in our schools. That is becoming more and more prevalent for whatever reason. Parents and students often do not know where to turn when it comes to mental health issues in our schools. Sometimes the support is simply not available.

Schools are facing an increase in students who are undergoing a variety of different challenges and difficulties related to drug use and addictions, mental health illnesses. It is often the guidance counsellor to whom they turn for support. Though government has talked about it for a number of years of reducing the ratio for guidance staff from the current one guidance counsellor for every 500 students to something lower, nothing has really been done.

We have to realize that guidance counsellors are responsible for a variety of different things: counselling, and dealing with scholarships with students. We recognized students here in the House of Assembly this week for significant achievements when it came to scholarships. You can mark it in your book that the guidance

staff had a lot to do with those student's successes this year and in prior years. That is the way it happens in schools.

Guidance counsellors are responsible for providing career guidance advice, dealing with family living issues, overseeing student support services, a variety of different student support services, doing crisis intervention and completing comprehensive assessments for students with exceptionalities. Some of those comprehensive assessments that need to be carried out can take up to twenty hours to complete. We know some schools have up to thirty or forty students wait-listed for those sorts of comprehensive assessments. If you do the math on that, that is a lot of hours.

Students often have to wait several days as a result of the backlog, the bottleneck for assessment, especially when they do not indicate it is an emergency or they have not disclosed that they are having some form of crisis or emergency. So there is something very wrong there and something needs to be done.

They did do something in the Province of Nova Scotia. I know it is probably not perfect in that province either but they did move last year to hire more guidance counsellors, along with more mental health clinicians and more youth health centre coordinators in that Province. They added about 25 per cent more guidance counsellors to their schools.

One of the problems we have in this Province, of course, is while we say we have a 1 to 500 ratio of guidance staff to students, in fact, really what happens is that in some areas guidance counsellors are assigned to a number of different schools, that adds up to 500 and they are run ragged. Students do not receive the same level of support as they would in a school where there is one or so on.

Speaking of math; I wanted to raise an issue with respect to math because I say if you do the math – and some people cannot do the math. Unfortunately, many of our students find themselves in that situation. I was really interested, when I was in the Education Estimates I asked about the math curriculum because we hear a lot about it. The former Minister of Education was asked about problems

with our mathematics curriculum last fall and he said math has always been an issue. I suppose it has always been a subject as well, but the point is mathematics, whether it is an issue or not, is something we have to address.

I inquired about this Western and Northern Canadian Protocol that we have, this common curriculum framework for mathematics. I inquired about its origins. I said this is based on a curriculum document that dates back to 1996. They said no, no, this is something we brought in, in 2006 or something like that. I had to go back because I thought I was wrong. In fact, the math curriculum we have in our schools today is based on a curriculum document that is almost twenty years old, and that is a fact.

I went back to try and find it, because the former Minister of Education said: Well, they agree with us down at the university. Well, they all do not because, of course, we know Dr. Sherry Mantyka and the Department of Mathematics and Statistics has for years decried the situation when it comes to math in our schools. He said they agree with us. So I went to see who exactly agrees or who does not agree.

I went and picked up an article in the *Educational Psychologist* which is a fairly reputable educational journal. A couple of things it said; it said that more or less based on an evaluation of all of the studies of this particular mathematics curriculum, which they call Discovery Math – rather than sort of drill math, learning timetables or those sorts of things, rather than that sort of math they call it Discovery Math. It is based on problem solving.

I will just say one thing, if you have a reading problem, a reading disability, if you have limitations when it comes to your literacy, and we know many of our students do, it is going to be a difficult time for you to solve a word problem if Discovery Math involves reading. This is what this 2006 study said. This came out around the same time that this Province decided to move forward with this math curriculum. It said: It appears that there is no body of research supporting it – supporting this curriculum, that it is effective. It says students enjoy it while they actually learn less from it. That is our math.

I really think we need to have a review of our math curriculum that is being done. It has been done in other provinces, like Manitoba. There has been quite an outcry in Alberta about it. Quebec is doing something very different than us, something that is worthy of looking at, because I am really coming to the same point that I came to the last time I was up talking about other issues in our schools, and I talked about other issues back then. While we want our students to be the best, we want our students to be first, we want them to score the highest; increasingly, we are not. In some instances we are the worst. In some instances we are last. In some instances we are scoring the lowest.

We know our young people are more talented than that. We know our teachers are more capable than that. We know our education system can produce better results than that. I know government often talks about graduation statistics. There are all sorts of arguments that can be made about graduation statistics. If you really wanted to look for a good indicator of how we are doing, all we have to do is look at the results of the Programme for International Assessment last year. That is an international assessment test that students do – fifteen-year-olds across the world in sixty-five countries. It provides a detailed breakdown of results across all the Canadian provinces and compares the performance of our fifteen-year-olds to students across the country nationally, and across the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Those results showed that Newfoundland and Labrador's students' results on these particular assessments continued to decline in key areas. They consistently achieve lower than the Canadian average on mathematics, on reading, and science.

I think one of the bigger problems that I did not talk about the last time in addition to all of that is that the gap between the reading ability of boys who are fifteen years old in this Province and girls who are fifteen years old in Newfoundland and Labrador is the largest in the country. Basically boys are scoring a lot lower than girls are. The gap between boys and girls is far larger than any of the other provinces, and also far larger than the Canadian average.

It is a significant issue. As I said, literacy and reading ability is a precursor skill that enables

students to pick up other skills, I pointed out a minute ago mathematics, or a variety of other areas as well. Let us not kid ourselves; the skills that we expect our young people to have today to get a job are far different than the previous generation.

Sometimes people think, well, you are a mechanic; that is not very sophisticated when it comes to literacy and understanding of science, mathematics, and so on. Nothing could be further from the truth. You take your car to get it serviced these days, if you have a relatively new model, and it is full of computers. It is like a computer. It takes an extremely high level of skill to perform maintenance on a new model car.

If you go and pick up any textbook from our auto mechanics programs that are offered at the College of the North Atlantic or private training institutions in this Province, textbooks are about that thick. It is very, very detailed information that requires high levels of literacy and essential skills. If you do not have those essential skills in mathematics and reading, if you do not have mathematical literacy, if you do not have a decent reading ability and literacy in other areas, computer literacy, well those young people are going to have a very difficult time getting and keeping employment.

We know that stronger essential skills increase the likelihood of employment. It obviously decreases the likelihood that somebody is going to draw Employment Insurance benefits and that they are going to need to have Income Support. It reduces the amount of time they are unemployed. It increases the range of occupations they are qualified and able to get.

That is extremely important because we know that young people today, the young people who are in the class of 2014 who are graduating this year, will have more jobs than any of the previous generations. Their careers will involve a number of different jobs and increasing their essential skills lifts their lifetime earnings.

MR. SPEAKER: I remind the hon. member his time has expired.

MR. KIRBY: There is a lot more to this, Mr. Speaker, but I appreciate your patience.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. DAVIS: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This is an excited crowd here this evening. For this hour in the night it is good to see that members still have lots of energy and interest on the matters that are being debated here this evening. I thank you for recognizing me this evening, Mr. Speaker, and giving me an opportunity to present and to enter into this debate at this period of time.

I want to use my time this evening to talk about some of the initiatives in the Department of Health and Community Services and also matters that relate to aging and seniors. As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, and also members of the House are aware, the Department of Health and Community Services is a new department for me. This is day thirteen, lucky number thirteen for me, being appointed on May 1.

I can tell you it has been a significant piece of work over the last couple of weeks. It has been a significant learning curve to learn this new department. It has been a very interesting process. There are a lot of new topics that I have been informed of, a lot of new topics that we have been discussing and things that I have not been involved with before.

It is a very large department from the perspective of the level of responsibility, being responsible for working with the four regional health authorities and providing funding to the regional health authorities. In fact, the budget for the Department of Health and Community Services is about 40 per cent of the entire Budget of the Province being nearly \$3 billion. Of course the far majority of that is disbursed to our health authorities for the delivery of services throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

Our health services and care services throughout the Province are provided through 179 health care centres, clinics, hospitals, and long-term care facilities. When you think about it, Mr. Speaker, for the population we have in Newfoundland and Labrador 179 centres, clinics, hospitals, and facilities around the

Province, it is a pretty significant number. I think if I do my math really quick in my head that is about one facility for about 2,900 or 3,000 people in the Province.

We have made significant investments. The Province has made significant investments in the last number of years, in the last decade especially, in trying to increase the infrastructure for the Province, in trying to make increases to and improvements to health care infrastructure. There are many facilities around the Province that have been aging and there are still facilities around the Province that need work and need improvements. We have plans underway and work underway for a number of facilities that will see work coming up. We also have work underway in facilities throughout the Province as well. Those facilities just house and provide the location and the physical structures for the work to be done.

Right now in Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker, we are very well staffed in much of our health care facilities and services and the requirements throughout the Province. We have 54 per cent more registered nurses in Newfoundland and Labrador today than the average for a Canadian, so for a population with 54 per cent more nurses in Newfoundland and Labrador than the average for other jurisdictions throughout Canada, I think that speaks volumes for the importance that we have put on those services. It is challenging as a Province. We have such a vast geography throughout our Province. This affects many departments and operations of government, and not only government but private business. It also impacts individual citizens.

Having such a large land mass throughout the Province, it does create challenges in many ways. Having the need for providing more services in smaller areas quite often results in the need to have a larger ratio of staff, and so we should. When it comes to nursing, registered nurses, LPNs, nurse practitioners, and also physicians we have more in the Province today than we have had ever in our history. We have more dialysis units and more dialysis sites in our Province than anywhere else in Canada per population.

This year we have funding in our Budget, Mr. Speaker, to set up our sixteenth dialysis site, to begin the work on the sixteenth dialysis site in Bonavista. That has been a continuous piece of work year over year making investments in dialysis to provide those services throughout the Province. I have talked about this in the House before as I spoke and presented in debate; I know first-hand sometimes the challenges that face members of the population, men and women of Newfoundland and Labrador who have to require dialysis services and have to undergo dialysis services.

My father was a dialysis patient for several years prior to his passing in 2007. For almost five years he did dialysis, which is about 650 or so trips to a dialysis unit. It was a fair bit of work for him to get ready to go to the unit. There was travel to the unit for him. He lived in metropolitan St. John's area so he did not have the challenges that many people face throughout Newfoundland and Labrador when they have to travel long distances for dialysis services. In some places you have to leave your home and relocate to other places so that you can avail of those services. I tell you I know first-hand, and I mean it very sincerely, that dialysis services can be very demanding and very taxing not only on the patient, but also on the families who support patients throughout the Province.

These investments in dialysis units – I do not think anyone would disagree; I know members opposite are very supportive of the work that we have done in improving dialysis services and making them more available throughout the Province. I see acknowledgement across the way as I am making these comments. It is about quality of life and it is about providing those services to the people the best way we can.

I am learning as well as I have been in this department, and again through my own experience, it is not just a matter of taking a dialysis machine, set it up in a location, turn it on, and away you go. Very specialized care has to be taken. There has to be the necessary resources in locations to provide those services. You have to have the qualified medical staff and team on site and available to oversee the operations of dialysis units. You have to have the right infrastructure as well, as I have said. You also have to have the right technical people

and the proper background to ensure that the dialysis machines operate and function correctly, that they operate the way they are supposed to operate, and are done in a way that is safe for patients and for its operations.

Mr. Speaker, as well in recent years we have made significant investments in lowering and decreasing wait times – wait times for a number of areas including radiation therapy, bypass surgery, hip and knee replacement, and also cardiac surgery. I mention those because we are amongst the shortest wait times in Canada for those areas right now.

We know that hip and knee replacements are growing. There is continuing to be a larger demand on hip and knee replacements, bypass surgery, radiation therapy and cardiac surgeries, all very important to people. The wait times on those, we are in a better place than we have ever been before as a Province.

I want to mention Vicki Kaminski in all of this as well. Ms Kaminski was the CEO and President of Eastern Health for the last five years. She recently left Newfoundland and Labrador to go to Alberta in a role she accepted out there. It is very interesting to say, and I am glad to hear it, that she has become so fond of Newfoundland and Labrador that her plan is to return here to retire in a few years' times. In a matter of three, four or five years, her plan is to come back to Newfoundland and Labrador. I had a chance to meet with her last Friday before she left. I had a good discussion with her in the office about some of her experiences here. I wished her all the very best.

One of the things that she has talked about, and she has talked about this a little bit in the days leading up to her departure, is about finding more efficient and effective ways to do the business of health care. It is not necessarily about throwing more money at items or at a matter or at an issue, but finding better ways to manage those.

When we talk about the decreases in wait times, it is a good indication of some of the areas that we have had good success with. Working with the health authorities and people like Ms Kaminski, doing important work in reducing wait times in emergency departments throughout

the Province, there has been some good work done as pilots and phase-in approaches in some of the areas – in St. John's, there has been good work done on it as well – to look for faster ways to reduce those wait times to deal with the less serious and simpler matters in the most efficient matter possible, and also to clear up the time of emergency room doctors, nurses, support staff, and other medical services in those areas so that they can focus on the more serious and more pressing matters. So it is a piece of work that continues to be in evolution.

I have used this term and I talked about it when I was in Child, Youth and Family Services; sometimes the only thing that stays the same is change. We should never be afraid to look at how we have done things in the past, to examine it to determine if there is a better way to do it in the future.

In health care and with our health authorities, those types of philosophies and work have been underway. We have seen the improvements of those and they are still underway, but we know we still have work to do and we still have a ways to go to continue to make improvements to the best of our abilities to ensure that the best services are being provided to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

As well, Mr. Speaker, there are so many areas in Health that there is no way that I can get to all of them in twenty minutes, but there are a number of them that I want to speak on. Maybe, if I get the chance, I will talk to a couple of them that members opposite have brought up over the last couple of days. One that is also very important and has been discussed a fair bit throughout the population is matters relating to autism. In this year's Budget, we added \$2 million to increase the capacity for autism assessments and to reduce the wait times for children with autism and other developmental conditions.

That \$2 million being spent this year will be annualized to \$3.9 million in 2015-2016. This year we are adding twenty-two positions to the regional health authorities and, in the following years, it will be increased to thirty positions. That includes the developmental pediatrician at the Janeway, a speech language pathologist, and a new occupational therapist.

I know, as well as many of us do here in the House, the importance of having the resources to reduce the wait times when it comes to autism as well. Some would say – and I understand why they say this – that is not enough. Twenty-two positions this year and thirty next year, a new developmental pediatrician, a speech language pathologist, an occupational therapist, and \$3.9 million annualized for autism is not enough. We need to do more than that.

Mr. Speaker, look at it this way. When you want to improve services, you want to add to services and you want to increase the capacities of subject areas, it is difficult to go from here to here overnight. It has to be a curve. It has to be an opportunity to develop growth. That is why, with autism, you see \$2 million this year and \$3.9 million annualized. We can add so much this year and then next year, we will add more, and in a couple of years' time when this thirty positions are rolled out and included for autism and for increased autism assessments and to reduce those wait times, then we will be able to evaluate the progress we have made on that and the impacts that we have had on that.

We did the same kind of thing with the dental program. We know the dental program has received much interest by the public. There has been a lot of discussion and debate. When the dental program was introduced last year, there was a very strong uptake on the dental program. It rolled out throughout the Province. There was a strong uptake on that – that was two years ago – and there was a fair bit of debate here in the House when it came to dental programs. Last year there was a maximum benefit of \$150 annually set on that. The program was rolled out; it was run. It was well responded to by the general public. This year we have increased that cap to \$200. That also goes a long ways.

It is a \$6.7 million program, Mr. Speaker. It goes a long way to help those people who require dental services for adults. People in the industry who I have talked to about this, I have talked to dentists and I have talked to others in the industry about dental programs. They will talk to you about when you have a consistent service year over year, if people avail of the opportunities to visit a dentist this year to get some work done, they go next year to get some more work done and so on, then in two, three,

four or five years, depending on your circumstances, your dental health will be greatly improved. Not only for an individual, but for all of the people who avail of the Adult Dental Program.

Once you increase people's dental health, then the demand for service becomes much less. We know that will be the case. When people improve their health overall, that applies to dental health as well, then the demand for service and the need for more care will stabilize.

As I talked about, Mr. Speaker, we have done a significant amount in wait times in dialysis; smoking cessation is another one; prescription drugs is a big area this year that we are making investments in. This year we have added \$7.1 million to cover new drug therapies under the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program. These include drugs – the far majority of this is drugs to assist in the treatment of cancers. This is welcomed as well by the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

As evolving drug therapies become available, they go through testing processes through the federal government, they become recognized as used for new drugs for treatments or drugs that currently exist that are now being used for different treatments. As those evolutions take place, the demand for these types of drugs continue to grow. We have added funding this year under the NLPD, \$7.1 million to expand drug therapies and available drug therapies.

The other one that has been important to people who have to travel for health care quite often is what we refer to as MTAP, or the Medical Transportation Assistance Program. I recently had a chance to meet with the Avalon Dragons. The Avalon Dragons is an organization that operates their boats from Octagon Pond in my district, in Topsail district. I know many of them now. I have gotten to know many of them. I met with the Avalon Dragons at their annual general meeting recently. I went to their meeting about a month or so ago. It was after the Budget. I told them about some of the things we are doing in this year's Budget when it came to the drug therapies I talked about.

I also talked about MTAP, Medical Transportation Assistance Program. This one

was particularly well received by this group of cancer survivors because they know very well sometimes the challenges that face people when having to travel for health care purposes. When a person has to go through radiation, as an example, you may have to travel to St. John's and stay here for an extended period of time. Sometimes it can be several weeks at a time as you undergo radiation therapy.

This year we have increased our spending on the Medical Transportation Assistance Program. We provide approximately \$3 million per year for this program. We have increased the monthly accommodation cap. There used to be a cap on accommodations. You could claim up to \$1,500 and now we have doubled that to \$3,000 this year.

We have increased the rate of private vehicle usage. If you have to travel in your own vehicle, the reimbursement rate for private vehicle usage is going from sixteen cents per kilometre to twenty cents per kilometre. We have increased the reimbursement for a higher level of costing. So at over \$3,000, the reimbursement level is now at 75 per cent.

As well, we have decreased the vehicle threshold. There was a threshold that you had to travel at least 2,500 kilometres a year before you were eligible to make a claim under MTAP, under the Medical Transportation Assistance Program. That has been decreased to 1,500 kilometres a year.

I can tell you the response from these cancer survivors at the Avalon Dragons was surprising. I knew they were going to like it but that one in particular was of importance to them because they understand and they know how important MTAP is to people who have to travel the Province on a regular basis for health care, especially if you are going through a health care crisis and you have to travel a lot in a short period of time. This travel assistance program goes a long way to help those who need to do that.

I want to get to long-term care for a couple of minutes and we are quickly running out of time. We also have planning money established this year for central medical dispatch service. That is a very important one for ambulance operators

and people who use the services of ambulances throughout the Province. That is going to go a long way to improve those services as well. We have a planning block there as well.

We have had some discussion about long-term care in the last couple of days here in the House. It has come up in Question Period. The Leader of the NDP has asked a couple of times, a couple of days now, questions about long-term care. I just wanted to highlight – because my time is quickly running out – that we have a number of projects underway, Mr. Speaker, throughout Newfoundland and Labrador as well for long-term care.

In St. John's we have a new 461 bed facility which will open later this year. We have a new facility that is slated to be completed in 2015 in Carbonear, that will have 228 new beds. Labrador City will have eight additional beds added there in the fall of 2014. We are working on a long-term care project for Happy Valley-Goose Bay that will add twenty beds for that area. In Bonavista there is a new centre built. There is one underway, a protective care unit in Clarenville, and work is underway on that one. There is also work underway for Corner Brook and Burin. I mention these as well.

I know the member opposite has asked about wait times. I have done some looking at wait times over the last five years, and I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that at this time now we are in very good shape. We will be adding over 200 new long-term care beds by 2017 as the plans progress that we have underway right now. That is going to go a long way to add to the quality of life for seniors and those aging and in need of long-term care throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your time and members of the House. I look forward to the opportunity to speak again.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: The motion is that the report of the Social Services Committee be concurred in.

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

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

On motion, Report of Social Services Estimates Committee, carried.

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At this time I would like to call from the Order Paper, further debate on Concurrence Motion 2.(b) the Resource Committee.

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

MR. A. PARSONS: Mr. Speaker, my light is on so I am going to start now in the hopes that I can squeeze in a few extra comments prior to the time. If anybody wants me to stop, that is fine. They can start heckling me.

I have 1:55, so I am going to use my two minutes very carefully. I spoke about health care before and I am going to speak about it again. The Member for Bonavista South gave a very riveting speech tonight.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. A. PARSONS: I will give him credit; he spoke very proudly about a lot of things. One of the things he brought up was the dental plan, which I have to talk about because I had the opportunity to do the Estimates on it.

The good news is they increased the cap from \$150 to \$200 this year, but they did not increase the budget. There are actually fewer people in the Province who are going to access that plan this year – fewer people. I do not know how that is a good thing to have less people availing of a service.

The second thing I want to talk about, it is something I have mentioned on a number of occasions, and that is the fact that when it comes to the dental plan, if you require dentures you can get the top half or the bottom half but not in the same year. That was confirmed right here in Estimates. I said, what if experts or professionals tell you that it is smarter to get both at the same time just due to the fact that over the passage of time your mouth actually changes in size? He said that may indeed be the case, however, the cap is \$750 and that is all there is to it. You get one half this year and you get one half next year.

I am talking about something that is well intentioned, but obviously is not quite logical. Why wouldn't you let them get the full advantage this year and not have anything next year? Why don't you let them get the full set this year and not get anything the second year? I do not know why that could not be considered, but it was not. I put it out there. I had people telling me you are wrong, but it is the truth. It was confirmed in Estimates.

That is all my time. I look forward to some rebuttal on that, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Lake Melville.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. RUSSELL: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is indeed an honour and a pleasure to get up in this House once again and speak to the Budget, and at this point in time Concurrence and the Resource Committee that we are all talking about here today.

First and foremost, Mr. Speaker, as I always do when I take my place here in the House to speak, I want to say thank you to the people of the great District of Lake Melville for their continued support and their faith in me to get the job done and to get the message across to government in terms of what we need here. I must say it is indeed an honour and a privilege to follow the member from across the way for Burgeo – La Poile.

I will say to the member from across the way he is one of my favourite speakers in the House, Mr. Speaker. I say that not because I agree with anything he says, because nine times out of ten I do not. The fact of the matter is that he enlists such an emotional response from the people on this side of the House and I hope those people at home too.

If you see me throw my head up to the ceiling up towards the sky here tonight, Mr. Speaker, it is because I am believing in the speeches of the Member for Burgeo – La Poile. The sky is actually falling in the House of Assembly; it is coming in on top of us. If you see anybody around me throwing their heads towards the sky, it is because of the effectiveness of the former lawyer from Burgeo – La Poile.

I say that in a lighthearted fashion but, Mr. Speaker, I also want to get down to the nitty-gritty here and talk about what is happening within these Estimates. People understand that the numbers for the Budget come out every year. What they do is we give the people on the other side of the House ample opportunity to have full access not only to the minister but to all those senior officials, those decision makers, the ones who put the money into play, the ones who put the money into action for the people of this great Province.

How it goes is we sit here and they get to ask questions about specific line items. To all those people out there watching tonight, a line item is nothing more than a number associated with a category. It could be salaries, it could be travel, or it could be anything like that within a department. They have ample opportunity to question the minister directly. If the minister does not have the answer, it goes to a senior official. If they do not have the answer, it will go to a more junior official and up and up it goes.

Even when, Mr. Speaker, somebody might not have the answer to a very difficult question – and some do come up – we will give that to the members from across the way from time to time. Once in a blue moon they do ask a question that cannot be answered, or request a bit of information that is not displayed in the Estimates volumes that are provided to them. The minister

and their staff will make sure that they get that information.

What does this all say to the people at home? What this says is our government puts together a Budget, and this Budget is a very good Budget. What it does then is it is broken down by department; it is broken down in different categories, the different departments within the department if you will, Mr. Speaker, and what they do for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

They then have all the opportunity they want to talk about a single number, a category of numbers, a group of numbers, and a function within government. What we see is that sometimes they do not even use the time allotted. That is fine; that is up to them. The bottom line here is if they have exception with a number put forward by this government in this Budget, they have more than enough time to raise those questions and get answers to those questions.

In some cases, unfortunately, it becomes nothing more than a fishing expedition where some members from across the way – and I will say it, Mr. Speaker - they want to hear themselves talk. They want to go on a fishing expedition to try and find questions maybe for Question Period. They want to look for things that are not there. We have seen quite a lot of that in the last couple of weeks when it comes to things like pavement, contracts, and whatnot.

The point is this: we are there, we are transparent, we are open, we are accountable, and we are accessible. Whether you are elected on this side of the House or that side of the House, the people's representatives have the opportunity to come into government, take some time to go through those numbers, and to dissect them. They even get to bring in their staff, Mr. Speaker.

Their researchers, pouring their hearts into these numbers hour after hour after hour to dissect them, to find a problem with what this government is doing, in all the time I have spent in Estimates, Mr. Speaker, I have not seen it. I have not seen something come out of Estimates that was so drastic that it was on CBC. We might go out to a sporting event - you will see

that on CBC - but you will not see something come out of Estimates.

I will say one thing about the Estimates process and the Resource Committee, Mr. Speaker. I had the very distinct honour of chairing for the very first time – I believe maybe even the first time that a Labradorian has been in the seat chairing a meeting in the Resource Committee - and that was for Innovation, Business and Rural Development. It was a totally new perspective on the Estimates process.

You are watching it go back and forth. You are making sure that everything is being followed, the time limits, Mr. Speaker, going back, making sure that from the Liberals to the NDP everybody has their fair share of time. It was quite interesting. I was proud to do it and proud to see it from a different perspective. We hear it from time to time about people throwing out the spin, throwing out the rhetoric and all that, but one thing is irrefutable and that is the quality of the officials we have in our civil service. It certainly cannot be refuted.

With that, I will talk about a few more specific things from the Resource Committee if I may. Of course the Resource Committee involves Advanced Education and Skills, Fisheries and Aquaculture, Tourism, Culture and Recreation, Natural Resources, Agrifoods, IBRD as I had said, and Environment and Conservation, Mr. Speaker. Probably \$1.8 billion I think was the total of those departments that represent those that are investigated, those that are looked at, and those that are scrutinized if you will inside the Resource Committee.

I would just like to touch on a few things that really mattered to me over the last few days, starting with Advanced Education and Skills with a budget of around \$900 million in expenditures this year, Mr. Speaker. It is a very, very large department, as noted by other colleagues in this House.

I was here and I had the pleasure of sitting in this House of Assembly while we had a delegation of students from Mealy Mountain Collegiate back home in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. They were in here checking out MUN, and checking out what the city has to offer. When you look at Advanced Education and Skills –

and how do I tie that all together? It is very simple. You talk about \$14.7 million being allocated towards more or less giving weeks of credit to our students who are in school right now – \$14.7 million over the next two years, \$50 million over five years to eliminate student loans, Mr. Speaker.

When we freeze tuition we start investing numbers such as \$19 million, Mr. Speaker, into upgrades to residences and into upgrades of the science laboratories. Then we talk about freezing tuition. Then we talk about making sure that our kids, our young adults, will be able to focus on getting that education without the overwhelming burden that always results from four and sometimes, if you specialize, six and seven years in terms of getting an education.

Mr. Speaker, that is leadership. That is a focus on the next generation of leaders. That is the focus on our greatest natural resource, which is our children, Mr. Speaker, as plain and simple as that. I am proud to be a part of a government that thinks that way. I am proud to be a part of a government that is going to say we recognize who is coming up the line. We recognize the value and the opportunities that are going to be extracted from our resources. We recognize that when it comes to those skilled positions – and here we come back tying it all into Advanced Education and Skills. We recognize that our children – and I have two of them myself, Mr. Speaker. I am proud to say very bright kids. They are going to be looking into the trades, going to be looking into medicine, going to be looking into those verticals to make their way in life.

I am proud to say that we have laid the foundation for not only my children, but all of the people in here that have children and everybody watching out there. For the next generation of leaders, we have laid the foundation to give them hope that they can begin to develop their careers and then start a good life for themselves right here at home. Contrary to what is being said across, the way the sky is not falling. We are at a wonderful point in our history here in Newfoundland and Labrador, and our kids are going to benefit from that.

Moving on, Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to say a few other things. Inside the Resource

Committee, we have Fisheries and Aquaculture, of course, and we look at just some of the great things that we are doing. I will throw out some numbers at you: \$6 million to support aquaculture.

Up in Labrador, of course, we are not at the point where we would consider fish farming, mussel farming, all of that stuff right now. I will talk about the fishery just for a little bit, Mr. Speaker. Growing up in Labrador was very different from Newfoundland. As you move further up into the Torngat Mountains, you start to get into places that actually land some crab, they do get some char up that way; but, for the most part, we were expanding on our diet. We were doing it to sustain ourselves. It was a tradition among families to get out, get the fish, put your nets out, go rod fishing – not so much for me; I am not so much an angler as a net guy. I like to go after my salmon. I like to go after my trout. Mr. Speaker, I will say I do smoke a fine salmon and I do smoke a fine trout; that is for sure.

What you will also see during our season up in Labrador is something I am very proud of. It does not really pertain to the Resource Committee, but I will say it anyway, Mr. Speaker. What you see is when the boys come in, they have their fish tubs, they have their coolers, whatever they may have, you will see them taking a part of their catch and you will see them delivering it to the homes of elders who might not have anybody around. Maybe they are off taking opportunities somewhere else, maybe they just do not have anybody to go out and get them a fresh meal, but that is the way we do it up in Labrador, Mr. Speaker. We share and share alike. We make sure that the most vulnerable in our community – sometimes it is an elder, sometimes it is low-income people, sometimes it is people who are physically challenged, but we make sure we take care of our own.

What we do is just simply give a little bit of delight that comes from the sea to our people, that comes out of our rivers, just to put a smile on their face. It is not much, Mr. Speaker, but up in the Big Land, the people at home who are watching at this hour will certainly understand what I am talking about here.

Again, moving on, I would be remiss if I did not talk about the good work we do in Tourism, Culture and Recreation, Mr. Speaker. Some specific things I wanted to talk about – I tell you what, I cannot speak enough about the past minister, very attentive, whatever I needed to talk about, whenever I needed him, whenever we could get him up to Labrador, with bells on he was ready to come up there; and not only just come up there for an official event, but come up there, get out and talk to the people.

The former Parliamentary Secretary that we had over here and our new Minister of Tourism, Culture and Recreation who has been up to the Big Land as well, the same kind of guy; he wants to get out into the trenches, if you will, with the people, and talk about what is going on, see what they want to see and get from this government when it comes to tourism, recreation and all of that, and he is going to help implement stuff like the Labrador Travel Subsidy, Mr. Speaker, when you talk about our athletes.

It is no mystery. When you are from the Big Land, it is a little more expensive to travel and get to the Island portion of the Province. That subsidy is there and in place to make sure those 1,500 athletes who might not have the ability otherwise, might not get an opportunity to come here and face greater, stiffer competition, get out to bigger tournaments, and get out to the amenities that are in the big city.

That is a wonderful initiative and I tell you what, we make great use of that in the Big Land. Time and time again you see kids, Aboriginal kids too, who come from sometimes isolated and very rural communities. We give them an opportunity to see what is out there. It starts expanding their minds, Mr. Speaker. It lets them see well, what are all these buildings? This is MUN; this is Memorial University of Newfoundland. These are places that we put here for you to have opportunities to change your life, to grow, to go further than you could have ever dreamed.

They come out here, they might have only come out to volleyball or soccer, or hockey, whatever it happened to be, but when they see that it starts the creative juices flowing. It lets them know that there is hope, there is opportunity, and that there is more out there than their little rural,

isolated community. That, Mr. Speaker, is invaluable and the subsidy is there to foster that type of thinking and to give those kids the ability to be mobile when it comes to their sporting life.

Mr. Speaker, while I am on the subject and I see my time is ticking away, twenty minutes goes way too fast, but when we talk about Tourism, Culture and Recreation, I have to talk about the \$13 million by 2016 we are going to have pumped into our ads. I will say this: If you look at the economic indicators that tell the world how we are doing and tell this country how we are doing, tell the provinces how we are doing, where Newfoundland and Labrador sits in there, we are up at the top, no sweat.

When it comes to these tourism ads, we are on the top of the mountain. There are no comparisons out there. You look at everything the other provinces have to offer – and good luck to them, we wish them all the best. Even some of us, we may go from province to province over time, but they just cannot hold a candle to us. That is just as simple as that.

I am very proud to say that we have done that. I am very proud to be a part of a government that wants – and \$66 million might have been the expenditures of the department for this year, but it is a billion-dollar industry and growing. I am proud to be a part of a government that says we are going to share what we have to offer, we are going to create jobs doing that, and we are going to let people know just how proud we are of where we come from and our heritage.

We are going to let them see what we do by the sea, what we do in terms of our development, and we are going to let them see just who we are as people. That is the real value in who we are as Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. This is what we have to offer. Our flare, our culture, our beauty, our music, Mr. Speaker, our art, and let's not forget the grub because I think we are world class when it comes to that too. You can tell by looking at me I have enjoyed some of the Newfoundland and Labrador grub over the years.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, going back to the Resource Committee – and I see some of the boys over here laughing at me. Yes, yes, I am a portly man. That is because of the wonderful

women in my life who we all celebrated this past Mother's Day who always take care of me too.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. RUSSELL: Happy belated Mother's Day to all the moms out there watching as well.

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. RUSSELL: Mr. Speaker, I am hearing some sharp criticism across the way too about some Health and Community Services issues. I will just say we have had a tough year in terms of my family and I will not go into details. I will say this, and please believe me when you hear it; we have spent some time in our facilities due to some unforeseen circumstances in our families. What have we seen, Mr. Speaker? We have seen heart. We have seen people who are going the extra mile, people believing what they do.

We have seen facilities, some aging that were due to be replaced, and some that are top notch. We have spent a lot of time in these waiting rooms. I have seen our health staff. They are busting their humps to push these people through to make sure they get to see the people they need to see, that the lineups are small, and the wait times are shorter.

It is one thing to criticize a government because they are saying we are spending all over, Mr. Speaker. We have heard things like we are being vindictive in our spending, which is just 'bullpucky', and inflated numbers in our health areas, which is silly. The real gems, aside from our announcements on equipment, expansion of facilities, new facilities – I only have a couple of minutes left, but I could seriously spend an hour just talking about our investment in long-term care and all of those things, but the real value lies in our staff.

I would just like to thank them on behalf of myself and my family and all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, because you see them there, you see some of them off shift still trying to help people, trying to get out of the building, Mr. Speaker. Those are the people who are the foundation of everything that is Newfoundland and Labrador because we respect each other and we care for each other, the same as this

government. It listens to and respects the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

We make those investments – and one of the members from across the way representing the Liberals said something along the lines of we are just spending the money – we are just spending the money. Mr. Speaker, we are investing that money. We are investing that money in our future. We are investing that money in our people. We are investing that money in the next generation: our kids.

You can spin it however you like – and this is all a game. I tell you what, you can turn on the House of Assembly and whether it is our side, their side, sure, of course we are all here, we are all politicians, there is going to be a little bit of theatrics. There is going to be a little bit of flare, but the bottom line here is we have done right by the people of Newfoundland and Labrador in this Budget. This is a good Budget, a solid Budget.

It can be criticized, picked apart. I guess some of the flare, Mr. Speaker, from across the way – and I do like some of those speakers over there. I enjoy them. I am quite entertained at times. It is in the way that they minimalize the issues that are being talked about in the Budget, in Estimates, and all of that by breaking it down and what they are going to do – and I say this to the people out there watching – they are going to pull on your heart strings. They are going to isolate cases. Yes, it happens everywhere; nothing is perfect. We are not perfect over here, and they certainly are not perfect over there.

They are going to isolate individual cases; they are going to tug on those heart strings. They are going to make you think that we do not care and that we are not doing right by the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. Mr. Speaker, I tell you what we do over here, we take the money that we have – and yes, it is a good time in our history right now – and we spread it out and we do as much as we can with what we have. We get the most bang for our buck. We are looking at getting the maximum number of people engaged in how we do things and the maximum number of people satisfied by what we do as a government. Whether that comes in the housing, health care, whether it is arts and recreation, whether it is investing in our kids in

our schools, we are doing a great job over here. The sky is not falling; this is the best time simply it has ever been in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is a pleasure to rise this evening and talk on Concurrence, and carry on with the debate. In this particular case I would like to focus on natural resources; but, before I do, the member opposite did talk about health care, the importance of natural resources when it comes to the revenues coming to the Province. This part I think I can relate to the last couple of days. I would like to thank the members opposite, all the members of this House, for their hopes and prayers as we are going through a bit of family ongoing crisis, I guess, if you will.

My father himself was a prospector and we grew up pretty much with rocks in our house, under our feet, in the family vehicles, and our lives were pretty much centred around natural resources. Myself, I gained a little bit of interest in natural resources, particularly when it comes to the oil and gas field and through my consumer work and everything. I feel a unique attachment to natural resources, so I wanted to focus on all the natural resources that we have in the Province here this evening.

It is not only just about rocks, Mr. Speaker, but it is all about forestry, it is all about some of the farming industries that we have in this Province, and it is about growing industries as well. That is where I am going to come from this evening, with some observations from reading the notes that our researchers took from listening in during the Estimates for Natural Resources.

Some of the observations that we found, first and foremost is that the Natural Resources budget – this was the one that really jumped out at us. The Natural Resources budget for this year is about \$646 million, but Nalcor was getting \$552 million. It was a big, big chunk.

Government thinks, for their own good reasons, that this is an investment in the future, and that remains to be questioned. That is fair game. We tend to think over here on this side that the \$552 million for this year could be very well spent in some other social sectors like for municipalities, on health care. We know that we have an aging population; for example, I would like to see the cap lifted for Lucentis coverage. We are the only province with a cap.

A note to the Health Minister: I know that there is an ad hoc committee in place now to look at that and to have that cap lifted, and hopefully we will hear from him sooner rather than later on that. We need to make sure that our seniors – and we are going to have a few. According to the CNIB, there are about 20,000 people in Newfoundland and Labrador at risk of macular degeneration that this drug can help them for. We need to make sure that if we are going to be making revenues from our natural resources that they can be directed in such areas, for example, like Lucentis drug coverage for all seniors.

It is interesting to note that during Estimates sometimes, coming back to the whole question of the monies that were going into Nalcor – the interesting part about Estimates when you listen in is the simple fact that sometimes you spend some time on line items like the \$5,000 items or the \$10,000 items, but we are not so quite clear, if you will, on the spending of the money for Nalcor. Again \$552 million and you want to get more clarity as regards where we are going with that and how much extra cost, for example, is being directed in the Budget to cost overruns, that sort of thing, and you cannot get the clear answers on that.

We need to establish that reality check if we are going to accurately discuss Concurrence for the Resource Committee. In the future, we are going to be asking more questions when it comes to the Muskrat Falls Project. There is no doubt that the government is going to have to come out with a lot more answers than what they have been supplying so far.

Having said that, the Department of Natural Resources is a very large department, it is wide ranging, a lot of fields as I already said. These are some more of the observations.

When it comes to forest management, it is interesting to note that we heard in Estimates as well I think it was that another company outside this Province by the name of Rentech is looking at the resources of Holson Forest Products and some of the former Abitibi assets. We are hopeful that something can be done here. We are hopeful that we will see a new industry bloom in this Province, but we have heard very little from government on this issue so far.

It was last Wednesday representatives from Rentech were in St. Anthony on a little fact-finding mission, doing a little bit of research. They met with the port authority up there, Holson Forest Products, and government consultants on the resources that are up there. Like I said this is promising – this is very promising.

While this issue is a possible industry player starting operations in the Province, the truth is that the forest industry has been struggling for some time. I can recall, for example, the former Minister of Natural Resources, in this case now the Premier, was talking about the problems with the industry. I would like to focus a little bit I guess when it comes to the forestry aspect of it.

We know there has been some slight improvement in the forestry industry, just watching the price of paper for example on the open markets. Prices have climbed a little bit. I will get back to that end of it when I get further down here.

Questions around the Abitibi mill - it sat idle for many years (inaudible) the forestry assets of the Province expropriated. The expropriation proved very costly for the people of the Province and expenses keep mounting for that. The latest being the admission by government that they will be taking down the mill and the Province will foot the bill for the remediation.

This is part of something I have argued in this House before, when it comes to environmental legacies if you will, when it comes to these being counted as debts that the Province will have to be paying out money in the future. I will also get into that again when it comes time. You can very quickly relate this to environment and conservation on the whole aspect of damages

left behind by companies that have previously operated in this Province or operating right now, that in some ways still are not going to be responsible maybe, possibly, in the future for the mess they leave behind.

I talk about a future development when it comes to natural resources, for example, of fracking. If a moratorium in fracking is not held in this Province we are going to get very quickly into things that we have never dealt with before when it comes to the disposal, for example, of fracking fluids. Right now the Nova Scotia government, just the disposal of water is being held in one pond. I believe they have budgeted something in the order of \$4 million for the proper disposal of it. If there is such a thing as a proper disposal of fracking fluids.

That fracking fluid is held right now in a holding pond that is susceptible to such elements, for example, as the weather or erosion or spillage. It has a great potential to damage the greatest resource we have, next to people, and that is our water. We need to make sure the water resources of this Province are going to have more protection than what they have right now. That is a little bit when it comes to the connection between natural resources and environment and conservation.

Environment and Conservation, to me, is the most underrated department of them all because they have a connection with every other single department in the Province. Not only does it go to Finance but it is well connected with Municipal Affairs when it comes to the water issue that we are handling. When it comes to boil water orders, for example, but also when it comes to the development of a natural resource, be it either natural gas or oil when it comes to the fracking process.

In the meantime, if Rentech does not pan out – just to get back on topic here again – then government and the people of the Province are back to square one on the issues of sustainable management of our forests. I guess there is a big message in that. There are only so many things you can do with your forestry. You can talk pulp and paper, you can talk wood products for building homes, but in some ways – some people have told me it is kind of fairly limited in its extent where you can go.

Again, not to detract from it, but I do believe there is some sort of future. We believe there is some sort of future here in the forestry industry. We want to wish government all the best when it comes to the development of those other resources that would use our forestry.

In Estimates we learned – just to carry on with the forestry a bit – about Corner Brook Pulp and Paper. We note that government has \$118 million set aside for Corner Brook Pulp and Paper. I guess it is probably because of the slight improvement in paper prices that they have not availed of that \$118 million yet, even though the fund is there.

One of these days, possibly they will draw from that. For example, they may end up having to use that financial resource if the price of paper ends up slipping again. Right now, I think they are doing okay from what I am seeing with the price of paper.

I am just wondering if they are going to draw from that financial resource. I guess there is some way the Finance Minister or the Premier can probably inform the House, or the Natural Resources Minister for that matter, that when the time comes to probably inform us that they have indeed drawn from that particular fund.

I want to move on to agrifoods development as well. There was some good news there. Although it is a movement across North America and although department officials have indicated an increased interest from stakeholders on establishing certified organic farms in Newfoundland and Labrador, this is an area government should be assisting interested parties.

Certified organic food is becoming more and more important to the people of the Province. Not only to the people of the Province, but if we are talking our own domestic market that is great, but we should also be talking about markets outside of Newfoundland and Labrador as well. I have to note that the minister was asked about this.

When it comes to food security, we learned in Estimates that the issue of food security is being addressed. Officials noted the Province is self-sufficient in dairy, eggs, and poultry. It is not

there in other industries, but officials did note the success of cold weather northern strains of barley, and the potential for growing these grains on the Avalon Peninsula.

I want to make a special note here too when it comes to growing, I will call them non-traditional foods too at the same time. I guess for some time the people of Newfoundland and Labrador – that only as of late has it become really, really noticeable. For example, you are seeing fields of corn that are being grown in the Province now. We are talking barley, we are talking some wheat. Along with that also come industrial factors that come into play, too. For example, pesticides.

I will bring up the topic of pesticides and the importance again here of the Department of Environment and Conservation when it comes to the use of these pesticides too, when it comes to fighting the various insects and diseases that could end up ravaging crops. We have to make sure we are going to be sticking straight to – how shall I put it – a safety culture, if you will, when it comes to the use of pesticides.

I am pretty sure that if government was looking at certified organic foods as a potential growth industry, this is one area where we can actually say we have a hand up on this right now. We are virtually untainted when it comes to these new crops, when it comes to the various forms of chemicals that are out there that can be used on these particular fields. I would exert caution on the part of the department.

One of the more infamous chemicals right now being used on some farms is atrazine which is pretty much wreaking havoc to natural water supplies in the central United States and causing quite a problem when it comes to birth defects and everything. I would point that out to government. Stick with the certified organics, develop that. I think we have something to sell. There are viable markets out there for it. I want to wish them good luck with that, but I want to make sure too, that Environment and Conservation knows as well about the danger of chemicals. They are going to have to be strictly monitored in this Province.

I will not even get into the simple fact that if you want to develop other farming industries – for

example, like beekeeping industries in this Province. We do not have neonicotinoids right now in this Province. It should be a consideration on the part of this government to ban that particular chemical, as it has been done in the European Union because it is actually a bee killer. If we do not have these bees protected, if we do not have the pollinators protected, we do not have any crops at all. It is a consideration on the part of government, probably Natural Resources and Environment and Conservation, to probably get together and talk about neonicotinoid chemicals in the industry.

I want to move on here because we are not just about farming in the traditional sense but in natural resources, too. One of the ventures they took up over the last couple of years is the cranberry industry, which I think everybody thought was kind of interesting. We did not picture ourselves in this Province, I do not think ten years ago, as being cranberry producers, yet we are.

I know the government, for example, has been promoting this industry, and doing a fairly good job with it, I have to say. We are about halfway to the point now where we can actually say we can get a little bit deeper into the industry, next to producing of raw product. I guess the minister can probably correct me on this, but I think in Estimates it came out the fact that we have about 250,000 hectares developed, and you need about 500,000 in order to add more production.

AN HON. MEMBER: No, more than that.

MR. MURPHY: What is that?

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible).

MR. MURPHY: Five hundred thousand. We are about halfway there anyway when it comes to the amount of hectares that we have. We are looking forward to hearing more positives coming out of this industry.

MR. MURPHY: Yes, 250,000 acres it is, sorry, the number they gave me. Five hundred thousand acres is what you would need to cultivate to support any form of secondary

processing here in the Province. Those are the numbers that we have.

It is something to shoot for, and something the government should be looking at, in helping the industry grow here. Like I said, the government wants to invest that money. I think that we can get behind this. I am going to probably say we have a fighting chance at this one; we really do. We look forward to hearing more news about it.

This is not going to be achieved unless government takes the recommendations of the Auditor General, however, a little bit seriously and works to clean up the act to get the proper paperwork in place and improve the oversight of the industry. There are some inequities there. Hopefully the minister is looking after that end of it.

The opportunities are great here for the cranberry industry and, of course, for the economy of Central Newfoundland. Who knows, with global warming maybe they will be able to do something a little bit further north. Some of the farming initiatives that I would like to hear about; for example, up in Labrador there used to be some vast greenhouse farming up north years ago. Of course there are some small amounts of farming that are happening up there now from what I hear. Perhaps the minister might be able to look at some farming initiatives to be undertaken up in Labrador as well. We do not want to forget that very important part of the Province. I see that my time is running out and I still have pages of stuff to talk about when it comes to natural resources.

Another burgeoning industry is the sheep farming industry. Right now there are about fifty-eight farmers who are currently in production. The lambing industry is strong, and government is assisting this growing industry through the Growing Forward and the Agrifoods Assistance Programs.

It is great to hear because that number, fifty-eight farmers in the sheep industry, I think that is up in the last couple of years. More people are actually getting into farming. We have to note as well that government in past years, of course, had the initiatives where they were trying to get the youth interested in the farming industries as well. Maybe that is a little bit of

proof here that maybe government's initiative is working.

We talked about animal health, I think, in Estimates as well. The rollout of the government's new animal welfare act continues with government providing training to municipal employees and various police forces. We would certainly like to see this program expand, of course. That would probably be something that would be done as well hand in hand with Municipal Affairs. We look forward to hearing about more municipalities that will be availing of that.

Let's get into the mineral resource management end of things and talk about Hebron. With a lot of attention focused on the Muskrat Falls hydro project, this project continues to develop, albeit sometimes you do not hear a lot from Hebron; we hear a lot more about Muskrat, more so than some of our offshore industries in the recent weeks and months. Nalcor has a 4.9 per cent equity stake in the Hebron oil deposit and therefore is on the hook for about 4.9 per cent of the cost of developing the project, including the construction of a GBS at the Bull Arm site.

I also have to know and I will ask the question to the minister, because we are a 4.9 per cent equity into it, of course, it remains to be seen when the project is over with and when it is done are we also going to be responsible for 4.9 per cent of the cleanup cost too, or the remediation, whatever is going to happen offshore? We will have to see what happens. It is a long ways down the road, but it is a question well worth asking.

Officials noted that Nalcor's share of the expected \$14 billion plus costs of this project will be \$360 million until first oil. As the GBS is being developed, it is the time to address long-standing concerns regarding environmental safety in the offshore and in providing safety, and improving safety for workers flying offshore. I said it the other day during my response to the Budget as well the first time that I was up talking about the importance of the twenty-nine recommendations under the Wells inquiry. We are going further out. We are going to deeper water. We are going 400 kilometres outwards. As one member across the way put it, we are going 1,100 metres down.

We are entering dangerous waters. Not that the whole North Atlantic is not dangerous, but this is unchartered territory.

We have to remember the Deepwater Horizon and, of course, Cougar Flight 491, the loss of our personnel offshore with the Ocean Ranger as well. We have deep concerns. We will continue pressing those matters.

Mr. Speaker, I see that my time is up. I have a lot more here I wanted to comment on: Old Harry, continue on with the fracking moratorium, source water protection is a must, cleanup of the (inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The member's time has expired.

MR. MURPHY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS PERRY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It certainly is a pleasure for me to rise and join my colleagues here in the House of Assembly tonight and speak to the Concurrence debate for the Resource Committee. The Estimates Committees are very interesting, Mr. Speaker. As my colleague from Baie Verte – Springdale likes to do, he actually sits on the Estimates of all the sector committees, because they are so very informative.

We really get down, I guess, into the weeds of what each department is doing and where the dollars are being spent, Mr. Speaker. In particular, for us in the Resource Committee, our focus was the Department of Advanced Education and Skills, Environment and Conservation, the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture, Innovation, Business and Rural Development, Natural Resources, and Tourism, Culture and Recreation

Mr. Speaker, for me and in my District of Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune, these particular departments are very, very relevant. Municipal Affairs, of course, is another one and certainly

all of the departments are very important to us. In terms of the ministers who have a frequent lobby effort from me, many of them are the heads of our resource departments.

Mr. Speaker, when I look to the expenditures of the Department of Fisheries and Aquaculture I am so very proud of the investment our government, the PC Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, is making in rural Newfoundland and Labrador to grow an innovative industry –

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS PERRY: –that will enable us to be leaders throughout the world, and enable us to continue to have a fishery of the future that contributes significantly to the entire economy of Newfoundland and Labrador. As well, my colleague from Springdale – Baie Verte enjoys the benefits of shellfish aquaculture in his region. Fin fish aquaculture as well as shellfish aquaculture, are both very important in the Coast of Bays.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of some of the investments that have been made by our government over the years, we have invested very heavily in the infrastructure that is required to support this sector, in particular wharves, the new fish health facility, and hatcheries in the area. We also have three processing plants. I am very pleased to say tonight that the facility in Hermitage, a brand new, state-of-the-art fish plant has been built and is opening its doors very soon.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS PERRY: We are going to see production renewed in the community of Hermitage. I am so very pleased to see that.

As we move forward, Mr. Speaker, and continue to increase the volume of production in the region, both plants in St. Alban's and Harbour Breton are very high priorities. We anticipate that all three facilities, as we continue to grow the industry, will be very viable and providing an excellent food source not only to Newfoundland and Labrador, but indeed to the entire world.

Innovation, Business – I am going to leave that one for next because there are some things in particular I want to talk about there. In the Department of Natural Resources, Mr. Speaker, one sector that is very, very important to the people of Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune is that of forestry. Throughout the centuries, Bay d’Espoir itself was actually settled because of the forestry sector. The outlying communities were the fishing areas, but of course a lot of them being islands, there is not a large abundance of wood.

That was actually how Bay d’Espoir evolved. Throughout the 1960s, Bowater was a major employer throughout the region. In recent years the sector has had some challenges. We are certainly looking forward to the continued developments of the Department of Natural Resources and this government to see what can be done in the forestry sector, and there are some very promising initiatives on the horizon. As a result of these initiatives, when they get developed, I certainly will be advocating for resurgence and a re-emphasis on the forestry sector in my region. We have, in particular, some silviculture workers, and the minister knows I advocate very frequently on their behalf. Certainly, as we see the forestry sector come back in Central Newfoundland, we are going to see silviculture come back in the Coast of Bays region, and that is something we are all committed to seeing happen.

Now I am going to move on to the Department of Innovation, Business and Rural Development, which is very exciting for us. It is a department that I worked with in my former life. I worked with the community economic development, with the zonal board. IBRD was one of the key departments that we dealt with, and it is certainly such a pleasure for me now to be working very closely with many of these people again. Just last week, I started my new role as Parliamentary Secretary with the hon. Minister Sullivan.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS PERRY: I tell you, I am going to have a fantastic learning experience in this department, and I have already enjoyed it very, very thoroughly. I know it is going to continue to get better and better.

Last Friday, I had the pleasure of representing Minister Sullivan at a CME workshop here in St. John’s. It was so refreshing to see the life, the energy, the innovation, the intelligence in that room. Things are happening in Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker. We are a global leaders because of the work that is happening right here in this Province, with the support of this government through the Department of Innovation, Business and Rural Development.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS PERRY: I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that I was actually a little shocked and appalled when I read the paper today and I heard the radio clippings today talking about Newfoundland and Labrador as being at its worst, last, and lowest. I was shocked. Never before have I ever heard such negativity. It is hard to believe – and I am going to produce the facts on that, Mr. Speaker.

I am going back again to the CME conference just to talk about how Canada, how the international community looks at Newfoundland and Labrador today under Progressive Conservative leadership. I received an e-mail from the keynote on Friday. This is what he had to say: What I saw yesterday is what makes Canadians and other provinces take notice of the leadership you are nurturing by supporting, coaching, and showing people what can be done.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS PERRY: I came away feeling that you have the right grasp on innovation in focusing on the foundations of innovation by supporting process innovation, such as what we saw this Friday.

Mr. Speaker, that is just a small example of what Canadians and the international community are saying about Newfoundland and Labrador under the leadership of this government.

I have to say, there was one thing, though, that I did like about the Leader of the Opposition’s speech. It was great to see that all of the Tories in his fold are calling the shots over there, because he clearly stated a Conservative policy, right of centre. He wants deficit reduction, Mr. Speaker, a Conservative policy out of the four of the Liberal platform. It was very interesting to see.

From what I read in the paper, he spewed a number of economic indicators that show us – and I cannot believe it, appalling – worst, last, lowest. I never hear tell of it since the 1990s, Mr. Speaker. There has not been that kind of talk about this Province since the Liberal government was in power.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS PERRY: That is not what the Conference Board of Canada is saying at all, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to know where these economic indicators came from. I am not sure if they came out of a Smarties box, but the economic indicators, as produced by the Department of Finance of this government – and I tell you, I have full confidence in the people of our Department of Finance, every which way, and I will take their numbers over what was spewed last night any day.

Let's talk about the facts. We have seen significant growth in our Province since 2003 and the change has been remarkable. From 2003 to 2013, capital investment increased by 232.1 per cent. Last year alone, capital investment totalled \$12.3 billion, mainly associated with major projects: Hebron, Muskrat Falls, and the Vale nickel processing facility. In practical terms, this means that companies are investing money in projects, which then result in increased employment for the people of the Province – increased employment.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS PERRY: We will get to talking about the employment that you criticized shortly, Mr. Speaker. I have a little stat on it here and then we will go into some more. Employment has increased by 9.9 per cent.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS PERRY: He said last night, Mr. Speaker, mislead the people, saying the lowest employment when, in fact, the highest it has ever been, increased by 9.9 per cent in the last decade under the leadership of this government.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS PERRY: Employment reached record levels last year, and the unemployment rate declined to the lowest rate since 1973. These are the facts, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS PERRY: More people are working in our Province than ever before, and the increase in employment is leading to higher wages.

Average weekly earnings in the Province, Mr. Speaker, in 2013 were higher than most provinces in all of Canada, estimated at \$951 behind only Alberta. I have said this in the House before: Whoever would have thought that Newfoundland and Labrador would have the second-highest wages in the country second only to Alberta? Wow, what leadership is that?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS PERRY: From 2003 to 2013 average weekly earnings, Mr. Speaker, increased by 48.6 per cent. Combine these factors with the unprecedented reductions in income tax by our government which has put over \$500 million back into the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians – \$500 million of taxpayers' dollars back into the pockets of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS PERRY: I have to wonder, I am thinking, every day they stand up they ask for this, they ask for that, we are going to do this, we are going to do that. I would like to know how they are going to do it. That \$500 million that is in the taxpayers' pockets, Mr. Speaker, they are looking for that. They are looking to take that back. I have every confidence that is part of their plan.

From 2003 to 2013, disposable income per capita increased by 75.8 per cent. That is more money the people have to spend on goods and services, which results in an increase in retail sales and consumer spending in general. From 2003 to 2013, retail sales grew by 48.6 per cent.

Our Province was second among provinces last year in retail sales growth, again second place in the country. What was it: worst, last, lowest? We are second place in the country for retail sales growth last year and for the last ten years. Retail sales were driven by new car sales which were the highest number ever recorded in the Province, Mr. Speaker.

Let us talk about a few more of those factual economic indicators; real GDP growth of 0.5 per cent in 2013 in Newfoundland and Labrador. We are strongest among provinces in all of Canada for economic growth at 5.9 per cent, the leader in the country, the top in the country.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MS PERRY: Employment growth of 0.3 per cent with average employment of 233,500 people. In 2013, average employment in the Province was 232,800 people – a record high. So again, Mr. Speaker, the truth is - what was last year? It was the highest employment ever seen in Newfoundland and Labrador. These are the facts.

Mr. Speaker, we have a stable unemployment rate at 11.4 per cent. In 2013 it was, as I said earlier, the lowest it has been since 1973, forty years –

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible) population now, talk about that.

MS PERRY: The population is increasing as well, Mr. Speaker.

Now, household income growth of 3.4 per cent; household income growth to \$22.8 billion; disposable income growth of 3.5 per cent; retail sales again of 3.6 per cent; capital investment growth of 2.4 per cent. The value of mineral shipments is anticipated to increase about 2 per cent to \$3.8 billion on the strength of higher iron ore production – and here it is: The Province's population is expected to be stable in 2014 at – listen to this – 526,700 people.

Find me a stat in the 1990s that said we had 526,000 people. You will not find it; it is not there. That was the era of the brain drain. That was the era of the higher taxes. That was the era of the Liberal Administration. That was the era

of the low confidence in Newfoundland and Labrador. That was the era when investors were not interested in looking at us, Mr. Speaker.

I am running out of time, but I still have a few minutes left. Another comment that was made last night: The PC government squandered \$18.9 billion. What did we squander it on is what I would like to know: schools, roads, diabetes pumps for children?

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile, on a point of order.

MR. A. PARSONS: (Inaudible).

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

There is no point of order.

MS PERRY: Let's get back to talking again. Are they saying that we squandered money by investing in diabetes pumps for children, Mr. Speaker, and then extending that to the age of twenty-five?

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Oh, oh!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

MS PERRY: Can you believe that, Mr. Speaker? I do not call that squandering; I call that an investment in our people, the people who we care about.

We also expanded drug coverage. There are a lot more drugs now on our drug program than there was when we came into office in 2003. Through initiatives like the Generic Drug Pricing Policy, we are putting more money back into the people's pockets and more drugs under our drug coverage program. We are helping the people of the Province who need it most.

What other kinds of things are we doing? The Residential Energy Efficiency Program, is that squandering? What about the Medical Transportation Assistance Program? I can certainly attest, Mr. Speaker, that makes a huge difference to the people of my district.

If we have to travel to St. John's for radiation services, for any kind of specialist treatment, we have to drive 567 kilometres and that is just one

way. It takes us two days to make the trip and that is just driving in and driving out. We have to eat on the way in and on the way out. We have to have somewhere to stay on the way in and on the way out.

Every trip to St. John's for a person who has a medical illness is costing them about \$1,000. Let me tell you, the Medical Transportation Assistance Program is really making a difference. It is helping minimize the stress that people who are facing illnesses really do not need. I do not call that squandering, Mr. Speaker. I call that an investment in the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

That leads me back to how will they deliver on all the promises that they get up here and make on a daily basis? What are they going to do? What are they going to cut? Are they going to cut these initiatives that we have implemented or are they going to raise taxes? I wonder, Mr. Speaker, what is their plan? Hopefully they will come clean about the details before too long.

One of the things that perturbed me that I heard was talking about centres of excellence. What does that mean for rural remote communities like mine? We want health care to improve, Mr. Speaker. We want our clinics to improve. We do not want to have to drive hundreds of kilometres to a centre of excellence; we want to receive that health treatment in our communities. That is what this government is pushing for. That is what this government supports.

I tell you, Mr. Speaker, I am very worried about what would happen to this Province if a Liberal government were ever to come back into power. I am very confident it will be a long time before that happens because people are not fooled by spin and people are not fooled by misleading information. People see the results of what is happening in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Young people are deciding to stay in Newfoundland and Labrador. The international community and the national community do have confidence in the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and the leadership of Newfoundland and Labrador. We, Mr. Speaker, are going to work very hard to make sure that this growth continues and continues to get even better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

MR. J. BENNETT: Mr. Speaker, thank you for this opportunity. I would like to make a public service announcement first: Cape St. George has gotten rid of the sperm whale. I notify the member.

In any event, tonight I would like to speak about issues that we find in corrections in the Province. Corrections, I suppose, in a way, means that you got it wrong so you have to go back and learn it over. It does not apply to members of the House of Assembly. Although, in some cases, I am sure that it might as well. It applies to people who are convicted, people who have broken the law, and people who run afoul of the law. Primarily, the ones that I am speaking about tonight are people who end up serving time, with time incarcerated, jail time.

Depending on the person's point of view as to how they view crime and punishment, you have to decide: What is the penalty for being found guilty of a criminal offence? In progressive systems, people believe that it is the loss of a person's freedom, public disapproval, that is it. It is the loss of a person's freedom and public disapproval, so they are locked up.

They lose their mobility, their freedom to move, to come and go. Mr. Speaker, it does not mean that they have to be incarcerated in really horrific conditions. It does not mean that they have to be incarcerated in conditions whereby if a person kept their dog they would probably run afoul of the SPCA, maybe other regulations.

Mr. Speaker, I had occasion in the last month or so – and for that, I am really indebted to the officers and the staff at Her Majesty's Penitentiary for giving me a half a day of their time in order to tour Her Majesty's Penitentiary. I am also indebted to the staff of the South West Detention Centre which is in Windsor, Ontario, which is the most modern prison in Canada. It is set to receive its first inmates a week from today.

The two types of systems are like day and night. Although I have to acknowledge, after viewing our penitentiary, Her Majesty's Penitentiary here in St. John's, the staff were superb. They absolutely showed me around from entry to exit, from administration from the old basement – where maybe one of these days there will be a museum – to the special handling unit and the hole which is next door, right alongside of it, through the kitchen command centre, all of it.

Also, on viewing all of this, I was asked by one of the staff members: What do you think of the penitentiary? I said: Actually, I have seen a few worse ones. There are worse penitentiaries than this one in Canada. His response was: Well, I guess that is really too bad because we thought we were about the worst. I said: Well, no, actually the staff are doing a very good job with the facility they have but the facility, the main part was built in the 1850s. The 1850s was a little while ago, and fortunately this government has announced that they intend to build a penitentiary. That can only be seen as a good thing in this Province.

Hopefully, with the RFP which has gone out – and I understand a few dollars have been allocated in this year's Budget for Requests for Proposals. To go back to what size, what style, and what location we would have, the South West Detention Centre was eight years in planning before they did any building. After eight years in planning they were able to build in relatively short order because they were able to bring in modular cells from Texas. In Texas they put a lot of people in jail. In Texas they know to build jails. They build concrete modular units and they come in on train or tractor-trailer and are assembled on site. They look like any other jail except maybe a little more modern.

Some areas where we could improve relatively quickly in this Province, one is that we could, and in my view should, go to a uniform dress code. We should have a standard uniform for inmates in Her Majesty's Penitentiary. The reason for that is twofold. Right now people bring clothing, send clothing, or wear clothing into the penitentiary and it is used as a way to hide contraband, to hide drugs.

Around the city there are people who are good enough at tailoring that they can sew pills into clothing. So clothing can go into the Pen, clothing can then be ripped and the pills can be taken out and there is contraband inside. It is pretty easy in the seam of a pair of jeans to sew in all kinds of pills. That problem would not happen if we went to a standard uniform. The standard uniform cost really is only minimal – very, very minimal.

In the South West Detention Centre, which has both a male and a female unit and around 300 inmates, they have orange overalls for men and they have –

AN HON. MEMBER: I mean that is (inaudible).

MR. J. BENNETT: I see, Mr. Speaker, that the former prison guard from the other side is commenting on it. The former prison guard from across the way is commenting. It is clear that she has not actually kept up to speed on current prison policy, if she ever was current on prison policy.

In any event, standard uniforms are commonplace in modern contemporary prisons and the cost is relatively minimal. The women's uniform proposed for the South West Detention Centre is basically track pants and a sweater. There is a uniform set of clothing.

Another reason the people at the prison would like to see uniforms is that right now if somebody comes into the penitentiary wearing an item of clothing, if they do not happen to be the biggest or the strongest or the meanest on the range, the bully on the range, the big guy, the heavy is probably going to beat them up and take their clothing. It could be a \$200 jacket. The person with the muscle on the range is going to take away that person's clothing.

As part of the policy now, it means that the staff in the penitentiary has to institute an investigation. An inmate complains that somebody stole my runners, someone stole my jacket which I came in here with, and the Province is responsible to reimburse that person for that clothing. It makes no sense to me whatsoever that we would permit people to wear street clothing inside prison for which the

taxpayers are responsible. The inmate may very well sell it for contraband inside and then institute an investigation. At taxpayers' expense, there must be an investigation carried out as to what happened to this person's clothing. Then the taxpayers have to pay to replace the clothing.

How can that possibly make any sense? We have provided a conduit for contraband to come into the prison and we have provided another source for conflict inside the prison. All of this could be solved by having a uniform dress code which would be supplied by our system. There is a whole range of prison attire available. A uniform means the same, and clearly it should be the same.

Another area where, on relatively short notice, prison life would be somewhat calmer is if the Minister of Justice would direct the Director of Public Prosecutions to review the use of intermittent sentences. Intermittent sentences are often called weekends. They are not necessarily weekends but that is usually when they are served, but not always.

The benefit of an intermittent sentence is if somebody is working or somebody is attending school and they have a relatively short stretch to serve, if the judge recommends it and the prison is able to facilitate, then the person is permitted to do their thirty days or sixty days or whatever on weekends or during the middle of the week. At this point in many institutions we have let intermittent sentences become the automatic instead of becoming something that needs to be justified.

The problem with intermittent sentences, when you do not have a facility that completely segregates the people who are doing intermittent sentences from all of the other inmates is that the people who are coming into the system on weekends bring contraband. If they do not bring contraband than quite frequently they are beaten up. They are assaulted when they come inside. So the next weekend when they come back they will bring contraband, and that contraband will be stashed inside their body. They will either consume it or they will put it in Kinder eggs. They will stuff it inside themselves and then they will go inside. This is the system we are

permitting to happen by not paying proper attention.

The direction can easily come from the Minister of Justice that for short intermittent sentences, they are useful but it should be proven that an inmate really needs an intermittent sentence, and would benefit from an intermittent sentence. Some of the intermittent sentences we are seeing now in this Province have people going in to serve their weekend on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Wednesday, Thursday. The two days are being served in many cases during the course of the week.

The person on the inside who is the heavy in that particular range can tell the one on the outside, who was busted for whatever, we need you to come in on these two days. We need you to come in on these two days and you have a steady flow of contraband and a steady extra work effort for the penitentiary staff which is completely unnecessary. These are a couple of areas, even before we get a new penitentiary, we could consider.

When we look at the penitentiary, the one that the provincial government has proposed to build, the first focus really ought to be on whose workplace is it? Who works at the penitentiary? Clearly, staff work at the penitentiary. The corrections officers work at the penitentiary. This is their workplace. Is it suitable for somebody to be in basically solitary confinement, has a job for twelve hours at a stretch without a window, sitting there watching inmates, and this is the staff. This person did not do anything. This person is doing twelve hours on and twelve hours off, literally, of solitary confinement because they cannot go anywhere. Hopefully, we will build a penitentiary and improve the quality of life and the job satisfaction for the people who are working in the penitentiary.

Something else that we really ought to seriously consider and do when we build a penitentiary in this Province is that we ought to have a penitentiary that utilizes direct supervision instead of indirect supervision. Direct supervision probably is something that you would not instinctually think would be the right way to go. It means that the corrections officer is actually sitting in a room with people who are

doing their time instead of having all of the individuals locked up in cells and have closed-circuit television.

The Principles for Direct Supervision are that it provides more effective control and that it provides more effective supervision. It generates a need for competent staff who are more interactive, and staff who are going to be able to deal with inmates more easily on a one-on-one rather than simply locking them up.

It has been shown that jails with direct supervision have a higher level of safety for both staff and inmates. It is manageable and it is more cost effective. The staffing costs across the board on direct supervision jails are less than indirect supervision jails. In fact, not only would we be more modern and have a better system, it would cost less.

The inmates in the direct supervision setting, if they do not play by the rules, if they do not follow along like they ought to follow along, then they go to indirect and they get locked up. Whereas if the people who are there doing their short stretches – and we know that in provincial time we are looking at anything under two years. Although the provincial government, in our penitentiary, we house a significant number of federal inmates as well.

Mr. Speaker, there is a resolution that was passed by the American Jail Association. It says:

“WHEREAS, it has been shown that direct supervision jails offer a safe environment for inmates and staff, and

“WHEREAS, direct supervision jails allow for a proactive rather than a reactive approach to inmate management, and

“WHEREAS, direct supervision jails are generally economical to build and to operate, and

WHEREAS, direct supervision is defined as a method of inmate management, which ensures continuing direct contact between inmates and staff by posting an officer(s) inside each housing unit, and further a housing unit contains sleeping areas, dayroom space, all necessary personal

hygiene fixtures, and sufficient tables and seats to accommodate unit capacity; and

“WHEREAS, direct supervision jails are managed in accordance with the Principles of Direct Supervision (attached);

“THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the American Jail Association” – Americans have one of the largest prison populations in the world – “support the concept of direct supervision in planning, designing, constructing, and managing jails.”

The purpose of personal supervision in a direct supervision setting is to see, hear, and to sense the moods of prisoners; to anticipate danger; to provide humanness instead of the cold eye of the TV camera; and to be able to react quickly and efficiently.

Now, Mr. Speaker, in direct supervision there is better inmate control because the officers control the areas external to housing. So, if you have a range, as we have a number of ranges in Her Majesty’s Penitentiary, and we have all of the cells around the range, then whoever happens to be the heavy on the range is going to run that range and that person is going to really rule the roost. Well if, in fact, it is direct supervision, then the corrections officer who is inside, in the appropriate setting – and I would encourage members to google the direct supervision versus indirect supervision and have a look at the types of facilities that are being built in the twenty-first century, given that our prison is 160 or 170 years old. You have to see the difference. You have to see what is happening today. Otherwise, you are sort of trying to compare a horse and buggy to a spaceship, not even another type of vehicle.

In direct supervision settings, the officers control the areas external to the housing, whereas the inmates control their own personal areas. The inmates control the action in the jail, that is in a traditional jail, whereas in direct supervision the inmates who challenge the officer’s authority are immediately disciplined and generally disciplined by being sent to a separate setting or potentially even segregation.

The prison that I viewed a month or so ago, it includes an infirmary. It includes an eight-bed

infirmery so if there are inmates who are sick then they do their time in the infirmary, which is part of the prison. The alternative for the prison staff would be to send the person to hospital. To send the person to hospital means that you need, in their system, two corrections officers plus a driver. That takes three people out the system immediately to take a person to hospital who is a sick inmate. The driver comes back, then you have two corrections officers who are full-time engaged to guard somebody who is sick and is in hospital, when it would make more sense to have the person in the infirmary inside the prison. It is a very simple setting. It is a very simple concept. It is very humane.

There is also a mental health section. The mental health section is approximately twice as large. Many inmates are serving time, and they may well be criminally responsible – it is not to say that they are not criminally responsible, they do not need to be hospitalized, but they have mental health issues. Just because they are inmates does not mean that they do not have mental health issues ranging from maybe a bipolar condition, to schizophrenia, to depression. They have a whole range of mental health issues and to put them in the general population is really unfair to them. To put them in segregation is really unfair to them because they have not been a disciplinary issue. So one of the ways that the South West Detention Centre have coped with, and continues to cope with, mentally ill inmates is that there is a mental health wing contained in the prison.

So I would urge the Attorney General on building – even calling for the plans for a new prison, to look at and incorporate all of the possible aspects that we would have in contemporary, twenty-first century prison. I think ultimately the cost might be less in the long term and our society would be much better served.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

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

Mr. Speaker, I am glad to stand in my place in this House and talk to the Budget, the great Budget of 2014. I listened carefully in regard to debate here tonight and I was quite interested to see one of my colleagues across the House stand with great pride to tell my other colleague on this side of the House that the population of Newfoundland and Labrador was 589,000 people back in 1992.

AN HON. MEMBER: It was 580,000.

MR. O'BRIEN: It was 580,000. That is fine enough in regard to the correction on the numbers, but the point that I will make, Mr. Speaker, is that was in 1992. It was a Liberal government and they drove just about 80,000 people out of the Province between 1980 and 1990, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: That is exactly what happened. As a matter of fact, I will also say, Mr. Speaker, that I ran in 1999. I ran in 1999 –

MR. A. PARSONS: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Burgeo – La Poile on a point of order.

MR. A. PARSONS: I believe it was a Conservative government in Ottawa that accomplished that goal, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: There is no point of order.

The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

MR. O'BRIEN: The truth hurts, I can tell you that, Mr. Speaker. I can see you nodding, Mr. Speaker, because I know you are agreeing with me for sure. I can guarantee you that.

I remember back in 1999, and I ran in 1999, I remember a front page picture in the *Gander Beacon*. It was down Byrd Avenue, Mr. Speaker, and all you could see were signs. They

were all blue signs, Mr. Speaker, but they were not all mine because the caption read: Who will win, O'Brien or the real estate people? Because everybody was moving out of Gander. The attitude in town was the last person left, turn the lights out. That is how bad it was in Newfoundland and Labrador at that particular time. There were no jobs, there was no hope, and there was no confidence in the people of the Province.

One thing that I will take credit for – and I will retire someday but not someday soon, I can guarantee you that, I can tell the hon. members, because I am not going to retire any time soon. One thing that I will take and take to the grave, that when we took government in 2003, one of the first things we did was instill hope in the people of the Province and then we instilled confidence, Mr. Speaker, in the people of the Province.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. O'BRIEN: That is why we are leading the country in just about every economic indicator that is out there. We turned this Province around, Mr. Speaker. Now, they do not like to remember that. They do not like to think the people of the Province are doing much better than what they were back in 2003 when there was not any hope, there was not any confidence, and there was not any economy really.

I will be quite honest with you, I say to the hon. members in this House, there was not very much of an economy. If anybody would think back to 2003, and before 2003, there was not much I will guarantee you that. As a matter of fact, I was in business here. I call tell you that right now, and it was a struggle. It was a struggle going into the banks. It was a struggle trying to convince them to give you the money in order to fulfill the needs of your business, I can say to the hon. members of this House. I went through all of that, Mr. Speaker.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition might not be able to remember that because he was with a chain. He did not have to go into the bank and negotiate his lines of credit and all that kind of stuff because that was all done for him, Mr. Speaker. That was all done from head office. I did all of that on my own, Mr. Speaker,

and it was a struggle. I can speak from the truth in regard to what I had to do.

We look at our Province now, Mr. Speaker, as compared to what it was in 2003, look at the people of the Province. My colleague from Fortune Bay – Cape La Hune mentioned that the average salaries in Newfoundland and Labrador, both individual and for families has doubled in this Province. That is because of a number of things, and I am not going to say.

I see the members of the NDP looking at me. I know full well that everybody is not doing well in Newfoundland and Labrador, absolutely not. That is the reason my department has taken such a focus in regard to the vulnerable people and the most vulnerable people in our Province. That is the reason we brought forward the 5 per cent increase in basic rate for individuals who are stuck there on Income Support.

As well, we brought forward programs that would enable them to come off Income Support. We encourage them to pursue their dreams and pursue the opportunities in Newfoundland and Labrador. As well, I have often stood up in my place in this House and said absolutely. Over the last eleven years have we done everything right? Absolutely not. We are all human beings in this House and all human beings are subject to making mistakes, but always admit your mistake, move on, correct it and see can you do it better.

The mentorship program we had in regard to our older tradespeople, it did not work. We brought it in, it had good intentions, but it just did not work. So we are going to re-evaluate that, move it forward, and make it work the next time around. That is the reason why we are an absolutely fabulous government in regard to meeting the needs of the Province and meeting the needs of the people. We create the opportunities.

I will go back to the 1990s again, Mr. Speaker, when we had the vision in our government to realize that yes, we had to maximize the benefits for our Province and the people of the Province in regard to our resources. The first thing we did, we renegotiated our deals in the offshore. We have super royalties. We are getting more revenues now than ever in our history.

As well, we have renegotiated the Vale deal. We have accomplished great things there in regard to increasing those revenue sources and base revenues coming into our Province. As well, through Innovation and Business we have invested in a lot of Newfoundland and Labrador companies and encourage companies to come to Newfoundland and Labrador and do business. We have done all of that.

I am going to go back to the 1990s as well because I think it was the early 1990s, or it was the late 1980s – as a matter of fact, I had a little bit of hope in regard to a Crown corporation of government at the time called Enterprise Newfoundland and Labrador. The bottom line of it is Enterprise Newfoundland and Labrador failed. It absolutely failed, but I had some hope in regard to that particular Crown corporation at the time. I was a businessperson and I was quite interested in it, regardless of who was in government at the time, because the people of that era were trying to do their best for the Province but the point of what I making is, is that it absolutely failed.

Nobody can deny where we came from and where we are today in regard to a lot of factors in Newfoundland and Labrador. Then to hear people say: You have not done anything, you failed at everything. Well, I would like to remind the hon. members across the House that things fail. They fail for a multitude of reasons because of the factors and the challenges that particular initiative might have experienced in that time and that place, Mr. Speaker.

In this government, over the last ten or eleven years, we have absolutely succeeded in a lot of areas. Yes, we have made major investments and sometimes we look at the investments that we are making. One comes to mind in regard to health care with over a \$3 billion budget; wise investments and that kind of stuff.

Are we meeting all of the needs of the people of the Province, individuals of the Province on an individual basis? Absolutely not. I would not get up in my place in this House and ever say we are meeting all the needs of every person in this Province because nobody ever will be able to do that, Mr. Speaker. That is not logical and that is not reality.

We are investing, and we are investing in important programs right across government. One of the areas I take great pride in is the division of Persons with Disabilities in my department, Mr. Speaker. I realize the challenges they have on a daily basis. As a matter of fact, I served a lot of people with disabilities over my thirty-odd year career that I had in pharmacy, Mr. Speaker.

We endeavour to invest in those people, in their lives and trying to make it better, trying to make them be able to have meaningful lives, Mr. Speaker. We have invested in various ways, not only just in accessibility in regard to vehicles, buildings, ramps, and all that kind of stuff, but also in regard to enabling them to take a rightful part in the economy in Newfoundland and Labrador. We have programs within our labour market, training programs that support, particularly, people with disabilities, Mr. Speaker.

I listened intently last night as a member from across the House talked about our Inclusion Strategy, Mr. Speaker, which has had a significant impact on people who require those investments to be included in our society; I absolutely did. He talked about accessibility. I want to remind the hon. member when he spoke it was just as if we have never, ever taken into account the need for fully accessible units and accessibility in general for people who are more challenged than ourselves, for various reasons.

I want to tell him that in the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing portfolio we have eighty-one fully accessible units. As well, we have built, since 2006, I believe, another 223. That gives us over 300 fully accessible units in Newfoundland and Labrador to meet their needs. As well, Mr. Speaker, I think we have about eleven applications across the Province for fully accessible units. That is really not bad.

Would I like to have eleven more fully accessible units to meet those needs? Absolutely, I would. I cannot pull a rabbit out of a hat; nor can my staff over at Newfoundland and Labrador Housing pull a rabbit out of a hat overnight and come up with eleven units. Do we endeavour to do so and try to renovate or whatever we can do and partner with the industry out there to avail of those units?

Absolutely, as a matter of fact, under the \$68 million that was mentioned earlier by my colleague from Bonavista South, he mentioned the \$68 million in regard to the Affordable Housing Initiative in partnership with the federal government. All of those units that we are going to develop over the next two or three years under that program, most of them are going to be fully accessible as well; and those are the kinds of investments that we have made over the last number of years.

Sometimes I roam in the House when other people are speaking. I will sit in the back row and I will just listen to what is being said in the House. I find it quite interesting, actually, in regard to that because each person has a different view of the world, a sometimes clouded view in my opinion, but sometimes a very clear view in regard to where we need to go as a Province. I think and I firmly believe that we are on the right path for Newfoundland and Labrador on a go-forward basis. I absolutely believe that in my heart.

I know that it has been a challenge getting from point A to point B, from bankruptcy in 2003. One of the hon. members across the way was here at that particular time when the Premier of the day addressed the Province. A very serious night it was. I remember that broadcast. I remember being an MHA at the time, newly elected, and not in Cabinet. I tell you right now, I questioned that night why I had put my hand up in regard to wanting to be an MHA for the District of Gander and being a part of government. We had daunting times ahead of us.

There was a lot of work done in those first numbers of years, in 2003 in regard to trying to get a handle on exactly where you were and where you needed to go, and come up with a strategy in regard to where you wanted to go and keep to that strategy. That is the key.

It is not to put the strategy up there on the shelf, and it is not to veer off that strategy. Once you veer off that strategy you are absolutely done. You have to keep to that strategy, to the cores of that strategy. That is what keeps you focused in regard to where you need to go. That is what we did, Mr. Speaker.

We mapped out that strategy back then and we kept on that strategy. We kept investing and we kept investing in Newfoundland and Labrador. As a matter of fact, I think as a government sometimes we worked hard and we might get blamed for being tired or whatever, but that is part of being a human being. I tell you one thing that we have never, ever, ever lost over here on this side of the House, and that is our hope and our confidence in the people of this Province, Mr. Speaker. We never will; absolutely we never will.

Has it all been about us? Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker. In my former role as the Minister of Municipal Affairs, as the current Minister of Municipal Affairs, we were all over the Province. I was all over the Province, and he is all over the Province in various communities across this Province making wise investments in infrastructure, trying to support those people and those councils who are trying to do the best they can for the people who live in their communities.

That is exactly what he is doing right now, regardless of political stripe, regardless of anything. That is what he is all about; that is what that department is all about. It is meeting the needs of the people of the Province, making sure that they have clean water in their taps, and making sure that he addresses the waste water issues in those particular communities.

I also say, is he going to be able to accomplish all of that overnight? He is absolutely not. Are we making wise investments and are we making progress? Absolutely; and we have been making progress since back in about 2005 when we started investing wisely in infrastructure.

As I have said in this House in the past, Mr. Speaker, any economist anywhere in the world will tell you that the wisest investment you would ever make is in infrastructure. Why? It is because you believe in the future; that is the reason why. You believe in the future and it is all about the future. That is what those investments are about.

We have invested as well, Mr. Speaker, in talking about our future. I am looking at two here tonight in regard to our Pages. We have invested more importantly in the future of our

Province and our students. We have made it clear to them that they are important to the future of the Province. We really believe that we need them to be able to go and pursue their dreams, take the opportunities, and seize the opportunities in Newfoundland and Labrador.

We need to have them as debt free as we possibly can where they can avail of that opportunity. We do not want them dragged down by debt and trying to struggle their way through in regard to the life that they are trying to lead. We want them to have meaningful families, Mr. Speaker, and being able to support families and stay right here in this Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. That is what we need.

I am going to wind down now, Mr. Speaker, but I think I have made my points here tonight. I am going back to those numbers in regard to the population of Newfoundland and Labrador. There is an obvious reason why 80,000 people left Newfoundland and Labrador, and that is because of poor management. Because regardless of the number that you have, regardless of the revenues that you have, you have to manage it, you have to be able to spend it in the right way, and you would not find yourselves in bankruptcy like we found ourselves in 2003.

It is not about the money; it is about the management. It is about the fiscal management, Mr. Speaker. I will take my seat in the House now because I think I have made my points. I think the other side has gone quiet because they just got a taste of reality, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

The time for speaking to the Concurrence Motion for the Resource Committee has expired.

The motion is that the report of the Resource Committee be concurred in.

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

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At this time I would like to call from the Order Paper, Order 9, second reading of a bill, An Act To Amend The Student Financial Assistance Act, Bill 16.

MR. SPEAKER: Second reading of Bill 16 to continue.

The hon. the Member for St. Barbe.

MR. J. BENNETT: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have no hesitation to support this bill. This bill makes sense. This bill is a mechanism to recover by way of converting a loan from a grant that was either too high or the person failed to qualify because they may have understated their financial capability. They may have dropped out.

In fact, the grant should be provided for people in order for them to further their education. Not just for them to apply for a grant and not make the best use of their money. If the taxpayers of the Province have a piece of legislation such as this, that grant would then be converted into a loan which is repayable back to the provincial Treasury and then it would be used for another student on a good faith basis, then I certainly have no opposition to supporting it.

In one way that this Province is doing well, and has been doing well for a number of years, is in post-secondary education and attracting students from other jurisdictions because of the favourable financial package that lets somebody come to this Province.

On my last flight in here just a little while ago, I sat with a young fellow who is from another province. He came here to go to school, to go to university. In fact, graduated, found work here,

and decided to stay and live. That is the kind of people we want to come here. We want lots of different types of people to come here, but young, energetic, bright people to come and contribute to our Province is a wonderful thing. If we use the student aid package and attractive tuition rates at Memorial University, and for other post-secondary institutions to do that, then I think we do a good job for our Province.

One concern though, a caution I have is I am really concerned that in the regular education system, the regular education system keeps falling behind, falling behind and falling behind. Over the last three sets of PISA scores it is quite apparent that our students have been sliding in their ability to compete in numeracy, literacy, and science.

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I would ask the member to make his comments relative to the bill.

MR. J. BENNETT: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

This is a bill to do with post-secondary education and it is to basically claw back, by way of loan, amounts that would be grants. The concern I have is that if the regular education system is failing our own students so badly that they cannot even get into university, how are they going to get one of these grants to convert into a loan in the first place?

While it is a great system to have, because the backup from other provinces is they have a first rate primary, elementary, and secondary and then they can apply to our post-secondary, clearly, we should be paying more attention to our basic education system so our students are more competitive to be able to apply for these grants which then might be turned into loans. Other than a caution about how we are failing our students at the high school level, I certainly have no problem to support this bill at the university level.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it is certainly a pleasure for me to stand in this hon. House and speak to Bill 16, An Act to Amend the Student Financial Assistance Act.

Mr. Speaker, has been indicated here by my colleague and other speakers before me, basically what is being done here is they are going to be inserting a paragraph 15(1)(f) of the Student Financial Assistance Act—it is actually going to be repealed, sorry—and it is going to be substituted with another section here.

The other section that is going to be put in here is basically going to allow that if a student has a student loan—or should I say, if a student receives a student loan and they receive more money than they would otherwise be entitled to, I guess there are a number of reasons why that could happen. I guess there are a number of reasons how that could happen, but if that were to happen we have the ability to take the additional grant money the student received, that they would now owe, we would turn it into a student loan so the Province could recover its funds and hopefully that could go back into post-secondary education.

Mr. Speaker, I think that is a positive thing. I think everybody on this side of the House, certainly here in the Official Opposition, would view that as positive. I believe the Third Party—I will not speak for them, they can certainly speak for themselves, but I believe they would view that as a positive move as well, as I am sure the government does. That is why they are bringing forth this particular bill.

Mr. Speaker, anything we can do to improve post-secondary education in this Province, I think it incumbent upon us to do just that. We have some great learning institutions here in Newfoundland and Labrador that this would apply to. We have students who are attending Memorial University and this is certainly a positive thing for them. I think it is positive in terms of—we have a combination of low education costs. I believe we are the lowest in the country now, even ahead of Quebec. At one point in time I believe Quebec was actually ahead of us. I think we may be ahead of them. If not, we are pretty close or on par with them.

Now to have a situation where we are going from student loans to a grant-based system, I think that is a positive thing. That was a positive move in this Budget and certainly something we would support over on this side of the House of Assembly.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, this is something that is going to apply to Memorial University. It is something that is going to apply to Grenfell College in Corner Brook, which would be part of the university system. It is something that is going to apply to the Marine Institute and the students who are seeking their higher education at that particular educational institute. It is going to apply to College of the North Atlantic, and of course there are a number of campuses all across the Island. We have students who would avail of these grants and of course whereby this provision could apply on any of them throughout the Island.

Mr. Speaker, I think based on that, based on the students who are going to utilize that, I think we would all agree that next to health care certainly when we talk about the priorities of government, which should reflect the priorities of society, generally speaking when we talk about those priorities, we talk about health care usually as the number one priority. We talk about education as usually a very close second. It is very important that if we are to succeed as a Province, if we are to advance as a Province, then we need to ensure that our population is well educated. We need to ensure that our children receive quality education both in the elementary and high school system and certainly in post-secondary where this piece of legislation applies.

I would be remiss if I did not echo, though, some of the concerns that my colleague did raise in terms of our Kindergarten to Level III system and certainly the concerns we have with that –

MR. SPEAKER: Order, please!

I would ask the member to make his comments relevant to the bill regarding student grants, student loans.

MR. LANE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will certainly do that. Again, just keeping on the post-secondary side, Mr. Speaker, as I said there are many students in our Province who will avail of this at the many institutions and we see it is important, as I said, to educate our own. We talk about, for example, physicians and the need for physicians and to retain physicians here in this Province. There is a much better chance of that happening when they actually go to school here, to our medical school, our own homegrown physicians. To have a program such as this, to have a grants-based program along with the low tuition fees, I think that is something that will hopefully attract and keep our own children here in our medical school. As I said if we have them here at our own medical school, there is a good chance we are going to keep them here to serve the people of Newfoundland and Labrador in both the urban areas and in the rural areas.

Many other programs, Mr. Speaker, we looked at our economy and we are trying to diversify our economy and we have a need for so many skill sets here in this Province. Many of them will come through Memorial University, whether that be children who are graduating, for example, in the business program, whether it be our nursing program. At MUN we have a Bachelor of Nursing Program. We used to have an RN system, now we have a BN system and Master of Nursing. That is all done through Memorial University. These particular grants would apply to them.

We actually now have our own police officers, our RNC officers which, at one point in time, were going through Holland College in Prince Edward Island. Now, of course, our police officers are actually going through Memorial University. Having this grant system here would apply to them.

Mr. Speaker, we talk about social workers and our social work program and all the students who would go through that. We would have a need for social workers. This grants program would apply to them.

Then we look at things like the oceanography and there is so much stuff. We do live on an Island; we are out in the middle of the North Atlantic. We are seeing a lot of programs now that are being taught at the Marine Institute. The

Marine Institute is becoming a centre of excellence in ocean technology, ice, and all those types of things.

When we talk about all those programs and the need to have our own children, as well as having people from around the world quite frankly – the country and the world – coming here to this centre of excellence, by having low tuition rates or I should say competitive tuition rates, in terms of having this grant-based system to which this piece of legislation would apply, we talk about that and, in particular, our own students who are availing of this, I think that is an important thing. This certainly would apply to them.

Mr. Speaker, then we look at the skilled trades. We have a need for many students to go through the skilled trades program. We look at our offshore. We look at the need for people who would be involved in – for example, students, to which this would apply. We look at students who would be pipefitters. We look at students perhaps who would be doing welding. We look at students who would do plumbing. We look at students who would be involved in carpentry. We look at students who would be involved in scaffolding and so on through the College of the North Atlantic. Whether that be the College of the North Atlantic here in St. John's or whether that be the College of the North Atlantic in some of the other locations we have throughout the Province.

Mr. Speaker, there is a need in our Province for all those trades. To have a grants-based system for all of those students is a very positive thing. I guess the bottom line is that we have numerous students here in the Province. There is going to be a labour shortage. We have heard there is going to be a labour shortage in the future. We certainly have a lot of the baby boomers who are going to be retiring. There is going to be a need for our young people to fill all these jobs. Whether they be jobs in the offshore, whether they be jobs in the business sector, whether it be jobs in the medical field, whether it be jobs in the public service, in law enforcement, and so on, all these jobs that are coming up, we need to make sure that our young people take advantage of these jobs, that they are properly trained to do these jobs, whether it be, like I said, through the College of the North Atlantic, Memorial University, the Marine Institute, and so on. In

order to encourage our young people to avail of all of these jobs and to have them trained and do these programs, we need to ensure that their education, and their post-secondary education in particular, is affordable and that we have programs in place to make it affordable for them and their families.

Quite often we see students who have to pay for these things. Sometimes they have family support. Sometimes they have to pay for these things on their own. Sometimes they come from a family that has the financial means. Sometimes they come from a family that perhaps do not have the financial means.

Certainly, Mr. Speaker, we have a lot of students who live in rural Newfoundland and Labrador and they have to travel to St. John's to avail of their post-secondary education, not all, but a number of them. Some might go to Grenfell campus, for example, over on the West Coast. There are some who maybe would avail of distance education and so on, but a lot of them have to come to town. When they have to come to town the costs they have to incur is not necessarily just tied to tuition, not just tied to books and so on, but sometimes it is tied to having to stay at residence at Memorial University.

Sometimes they have to rent an apartment, and there is a cost to that. Some of them find themselves in a situation where they are having to go to school and are having to work to support themselves. Some have family to support them, but the bottom line is, and where I am coming to with this, whichever route they take, anything we can do as legislators, putting programs in place to support them to make it more affordable for them to avail of their educational opportunities, and we do have a number of educational opportunities available to them here in this Province, we are certainly thankful for that, but anything we can do to make it affordable for them, that is what we need to do.

When I saw the Budget and realized we would be moving to a grant system from a student loan system, I think that was something we were all very pleased to see. I spoke to some students in my district, spoke to some other students who were friends of the family, and they were

pleased to see that we would have a system in place, a grants-based system, along with the lower tuition fees, to help make their education more affordable for them. They were pleased to see it. Their families were pleased to see it. Certainly, as the Official Opposition, we are pleased to see that happen.

As I indicated earlier, Bill 16, An Act to Amend the Student Financial Assistance Act, this particular bill is going to tie in to that program. As indicated, should a student who receives this needs-based grant versus the traditional student loan, should there be some sort of an overpayment for – I guess there could be a variety of reasons why that might happen, how it could accidentally happen and so on, that it would just simply convert to a student loan. I think most students would view that as fair.

As a Province, if we are going to provide low tuition fees, more affordable tuition fees, if we are going to provide a grants-based system to replace the student loans, then I think if there was an error made I do not think anybody would have any problem with having this particular system where that would just simply go to a student loan and they could pay it off. It is a lot further beyond where we were a number of years ago, where you had students graduating and so on and they had this horrendous debt.

After going to Memorial University, after going to Grenfell College, after going to the Marine Institute, or after going to the College of the North Atlantic and after getting their education, would find themselves when they now want to start out in life, get a home, get a car, settle down, whatever the case might be, get a job and so on, that they would have a large debt hanging over their head. Anything we can do to help remedy that situation, to help move away from that situation to make it better for our students, our children, our future, our future leaders in this Province, Mr. Speaker, anything we can do in that regard, including the passage of Bill 16, as one member of this House of Assembly I am certainly all for it.

Thank you.

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

MR. MITCHELMORE: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will be brief with my comments, but I did want to speak on Bill 16 because I think it really shows how important it is to value money and value especially public money. I, myself, attended a post-secondary institution on student financial assistance and doing so I think you acknowledge that when you are taking out a loan, you have to pay that back. That is very standard in business and in life.

One of the things the government did in 2008 – I was at the tail end of my bachelor's degree – is they introduced an upfront grant for a portion of the loan. In doing so, you do not have to pay that back. That is a wonderful thing, but you need to have a mechanism in place so that it does not lead to abuse. If there is not an accountability mechanism in there, then it can be open to abuse where somebody could continuously receive a student loan and not complete a degree or not continue and finish their program.

I like what is in this bill that allows for the recovery of the grant so that it could be converted to a student loan. I think this bill makes perfect sense, and I certainly will be supporting this piece of legislation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Hear, hear!

MR. SPEAKER: If the hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills speaks now he will close the debate.

The hon. the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills.

MR. O'BRIEN: Mr. Speaker, I am happy to get up in my place but I am not really sure after the second last speaker, or the last speaker what this bill is all about. I am totally confused. I do not really know what I am closing, Mr. Speaker. I tell you, I do not know. I have to process that, is the proper words I am going to have to use.

Mr. Speaker, this is simply an amendment to enable us to initiate a regulatory process and put in place a recovery mechanism in regard to

recovering grants that may later be determined ineligible. It is a very simple amendment. It is a piece that we have to have there in regard to a collection process, if that ever happens. We hope that it never happens, Mr. Speaker. We hope that every grant that we give out in Newfoundland and Labrador is used by students and used to further their education and they graduate and go on to meaningful lives, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, this is a good piece of legislation.

Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Is it the pleasure of the House that Bill 16 be now read second time?

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Student Financial Assistance Act. (Bill 16)

MR. SPEAKER: This bill has now been read a second time.

When shall the bill be referred to a Committee of the Whole House?

MR. KING: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: Now.

On motion, a bill "An Act To Amend The Student Financial Assistance Act", read a second time, ordered referred to a Committee of the Whole House presently, by leave. (Bill 16)

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

At this time, I move, seconded by the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills, to refer Bill 16, An Act To Amend The Student Financial Assistance Act, to Committee of the Whole.

MR. SPEAKER: It is moved and seconded that I do now leave the Chair for the House to resolve itself into a Committee of the Whole to consider Bill 16.

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

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

Carried.

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

Committee of the Whole

CHAIR (Littlejohn): Order, please!

We are now considering Bill 16, An Act To Amend The Student Financial Assistance Act.

A bill, "An Act To Amend The Student Financial Assistance Act". (Bill 16)

CLERK: Clause 1.

CHAIR: Shall clause 1 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay'.

Carried.

On motion, clause 1 carried.

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

CHAIR: Shall the enacting clause carry?

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay'.

Carried.

On motion, enacting clause carried.

CLERK: A bill, An Act To Amend The Student Financial Assistance Act.

CHAIR: Shall the title carry?

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay'.

Carried.

On motion, title carried.

CHAIR: Shall I report the bill without amendment?

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay'.

Carried.

Motion, that the Committee report having passed the bill without amendment, carried.

CHAIR: The hon. the Government House Leader.

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I move, seconded by the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills, that the Committee rise and report the bill.

CHAIR: The motion is that the Committee rise and report Bill 16.

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay'.

Carried.

On motion, that the Committee rise, report progress and ask leave to sit again, Mr. Speaker returned to the Chair.

MR. SPEAKER (Verge): Order, please!

The hon. the Member for Port de Grave and Chair of the Committee of the Whole.

MR. LITTLEJOHN: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole have considered the matters to them referred and have directed me to report Bill 16 without amendment.

MR. SPEAKER: The Chair of Committee of the Whole reports that the Committee have considered the matters to them referred and have directed him to report Bill 16 without amendment.

When shall the report be received?

MR. KING: Now.

MR. SPEAKER: When shall the bill be read a third time?

MR. KING: Tomorrow.

MR. SPEAKER: Tomorrow.

On motion, report received and adopted. Bill ordered read a third time on tomorrow.

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

MR. KING: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I want to thank all members of the House for their contribution to the debate tonight. It has been a long day. At this time I move, seconded by the Minister of Natural Resources and the Minister Responsible for Forestry and Agrifoods, that the House do now adjourn.

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

All those in favour, 'aye'.

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

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

This House stands adjourned until 2:00 p.m.
later today, Wednesday.

On motion, the House at its rising adjourned
until Wednesday at 2:00 p.m.