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*Speaker: Honourable Perry Trimper, MHA*

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The House met at 10 a.m.

**MR. SPEAKER (Trimper):** Admit strangers, please.

Order, please!

**Orders of the Day**

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would call from the Order Paper, Motion 3, the Budget Speech.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Exploits.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. FORSEY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's an honour, Mr. Speaker, to rise in this House of Assembly this morning to represent the District of Exploits, the people who gave me the confidence to come here and speak on their behalf and represent those people. I'd also like to congratulate the other Members for being elected and re-elected in this election and, of course, my colleagues on this side.

As I went through the district, Mr. Speaker, there were some issues that I got from door to door. One of them, of course, was the infrastructure and roads. I saw there was money allotted for that. In my area, you drive down through the smaller communities, not on the bigger part of the district, but in the smaller areas, the roads are really dilapidated, deteriorated and potholes.

It is disgraceful at times, so I'd like to see more emphasis put on roads and infrastructure, especially in our area. Because not only does roads and infrastructure – especially in our smaller communities, it means to bring tourism into the districts, into the smaller areas with so much scenic things that can be appreciated in those communities. So to get the people down there, we also need good roads to get people

down there to drive to, of course, and to get to those communities.

Insulin pumps were another issue that I came across in my district. And, to be honest, I didn't think there was as many need for insulin pumps as there was. I know that diabetes is a big issue but insulin pumps were, and I see there is some money allotted for that for insulin pumps, so that is a good thing and it's well needed.

Health-wise in our district, that was another big issue that came every time, every door, especially in the Botwood area of the Exploits District. People are really concerned about their 24-hour emergency service being cut in the Botwood area. Yes, there is a 20-bed extension allotted for Botwood, for Gander, Grand Falls-Windsor, but that's not what is of concern to the people of the Botwood area, Exploits area. We need our 24-hour emergency service replaced especially people – the geography of the Exploits district are huge. We can drive from Leading Ticks to Grand Falls-Windsor, when needed, that becomes a two-hour drive. Just to get to Botwood from Leading Ticks, it's an hour. You put weather conditions, Mr. Speaker, into those conditions and it becomes a real problem for the people of the Exploits District.

Also down in Fortune Harbour, the same thing. People would really like to get that 24-hour emergency service back in focus at the Dr. Hugh Twomey Health Centre. It also puts a stress on the people themselves, the family members that's bringing people to those – trying to get to the hospital. Anybody who's going to take sick, they're going to take sick in the nighttime, usually after 8, probably after 12 most likely. You get up in the morning and try to get someone to the hospital, at least not only take the stress off them from getting to the hospital just to be assessed, treated if possible, and that would take the stress off people knowing that they haven't got to go another half hour to Grand Falls-Windsor. To maybe see that my relative, my mother, my sister, my father might make it just because we didn't have to go an extra hour into Grand Falls-Windsor, whereas the 24-hour emergency service would take the stress off that.

Not only is the 24-hour emergency service a stress on the people of the Botwood area but also

in the Grand Falls-Windsor health care area centre. The people that have to go there in the nighttime, 8 o'clock, you're looking at more stress put on the Central Newfoundland health care centre because there are more people there.

I've heard stories now of people waiting eight, 10 hours just to see a doctor. They're waiting in the waiting rooms and it's not good for those people. The stress that it's putting on the people, the facility itself and the doctors – it's a strain on everybody. We need to get that 24 hours back. I'd like to see that put in the budget to get that 24-hour emergency service back, not only for Botwood but for, like I say, the Grand Falls-Windsor area as well and take the stress off that.

That is one of the big issues, Mr. Speaker, as I was going door to door that was brought to me time and time again. Then, on the other one, employment in our area – not only in our area, I guess it's all across Newfoundland and Labrador. Everybody is looking for jobs, they're looking for affordable living and they want to stay in this province.

Central Newfoundland Exploits District, we have a lot of resources. We have minerals there. We have the forestry there. We have a lot of things that we can avail of. So we need to start bringing in investors, developers to use that. I know that some money is now being putting into the mines and the minerals, and there's one supposed to start in Valentine Lake in the Grand Falls-Windsor area, in Buchans area. But we need more of this and we have the resources in there that we can utilize.

Not only when we're doing that, Mr. Speaker, I think there should be legislation there as well to put more emphasis on those investors and developers to clean up their mess. They come in, they take what we got, they rape our land and then leave all their mess. And they're not held accountable for it. So if we could also bring in the investors, create employment but also protect our environment as well. We need to do that as we move into bringing in investors and developers.

Mr. Speaker, that was another one of the big concerns in my area was the development and the employment. Affordable living – the people of my district, of course, where there are no big

employment jobs right now, the stress on paying levees, taxes and fees, especially on insurances, that creates the part of affordable living, being able to stay in the district, being able to work there, raise their families and people want to stay there, Mr. Speaker. They like Newfoundland. It's our home, it's their home, they want to stay, so we have to make it affordable that they can stay.

Then another big issue was the seniors' issues. Out around my district, of course – and, again, it's like it all across Newfoundland and Labrador – the smaller areas, the smaller districts, get in the outlying areas, the seniors become a big issue. That becomes a part of affordable living. They can't afford to get in homes. They're forced to stay in their own homes in an unhealthy situation sometimes, and the stress on those people is tremendous.

We need to put emphasis on all those structures, Mr. Speaker, because I know, taking the Exploits District into consideration, the geographic, the employment situation, being able to stay there, it's a stress on all people there. Employment, of course, would become one of the bigger issues, because without employment we can't afford to have our communities staying alive and paying their taxes so we can get their municipal roads done, their municipal infrastructure. So we need employment and that sort of thing to be able to keep those people there, and I guess our biggest resource of all is our own people.

I've had young people come to me when I was going door to door – not only door to door, but they came to me if I was in a gas station, in a supermarket or in a store. They'd say: Mr. Forsey, when you get there, will you help create some employment? That would be one of my biggest concerns, is to bring employment into that area. Again, without employment, really nothing else matters. If we don't have employment there, we can't keep the people there to avail of other sources.

Mr. Speaker, again, the 24-hour emergency service would be a great asset to the Botwood area. I'd like to see that implemented in this budget; not only should it be implemented in this budget, I know in the campaign itself there was a promise made, actually, to restore the 24-

hour emergency service in the Exploits District. I think people would like to see it – I'm thinking that was in 2021, but not only 2021, they'd like to see it now – because it's not what they want right now, they want their emergency service put back right now.

Not only that, the hospice in Grand Falls-Windsor – part of my district is in the Grand Falls-Windsor area, so if you put the hospice there, get the money related for the hospice, for the end-of-life care, you could take the 24-hour emergency service, it'd all be in relation. We'd have the 24-hour emergency service put back in Botwood, that way they can be there to be assessed or treated. If not, then you're putting them in Grand Falls-Windsor, in the hospitals there, you're putting stress on that.

Then, if you had the hospices up and running, we could be taking those people, putting them in those cares, that way alleviating more room at the Central Newfoundland Regional Health Centre. So that would be a system in itself that would work great for our area.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, it's been great to be able to talk about those budget issues, and I look forward, in the future, to having another say in those matters.

Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

It's great to be back. Like my predecessors speaking to this motion, I would like to acknowledge the continued support of the people of the District of Gander, and our small but mighty team who helped me through the recent campaign, something of a Darwinian process, I think. Certainly, it speaks to the conviction that my constituents seem to have in the way we have approached things, both on their behalf in what is possibly one of the smallest of the rural districts from a geographic

point of view, but also from a provincial perspective.

What I'd like to do in addressing our budget is to break my comments down into a couple of areas, principally around my own district, and highlight some of the things that are positive for that district within the budget; bearing in mind, of course, that anything is good for the province, as one of the folk opposite said, is good for my district, too. Then I'll address some of the matters, maybe, that come into my portfolio, maybe from a bigger picture rather than down in the weeds, as it were, because that is a process that comes out during the Estimates piece.

The District of Gander is, as I say, small. It can be driven from one side to the other in less than an hour on basically a single road, which is actually in pretty good condition, being the Trans-Canada Highway. The focus of population in the district is actually the community of Gander, which, in actual fact, was fifth in population growth in the 2016 census in this province. It's one of the few municipal areas that has had a significant increase in size.

It is a hub economically for the district, but it's also in many respects a hub for the province, built in 1938 around what was the Newfoundland Airport. People here will know that it came to prominence in the Second World War when, with the advent of Ferry Command and Bennett's flight across the Atlantic, it became the jumping off point for no fewer than 10,000 aircraft built in Canada and North America which supplied the war effort in Europe.

We heard recently about the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of D-Day. Pretty well every one of those multi-engine aircraft that flew over there would have come through Gander at some point to contribute to the war effort, and it continues to be an economic driver for the community itself.

Within the budget, recognizing Gander as a centre of aerospace excellence, not just for Central, but for the entire province, there was money there to bolster the next wave of aviation, really, in this province, which is around maintenance, manufacture, repair and overhaul,

and training. We have the only flight school in the province there.

My colleague in Advanced Education, Skills and Labour has worked diligently to provide funding support for the new integrated pilot training course that is supplied there so that EI-eligible clients can avail of complete funding for what is a guaranteed opportunity at the end of it. It's a job-ready training. To emphasize again the job-ready nature of the training in aviation, I would flip back to the other significant investment there, which is around the aircraft maintenance engineer program and the aircraft structural technician program.

For 56 years, Gander, in one form or another, has been producing the highest-quality graduates in the country from these programs. They are, and continue to be, job-ready the minute they leave the school. Currently, done through the College of the North Atlantic, before that it had been a trade school. Between the departments of government there's \$1.3 million going into that AME structural program. Broken down, it represents half a million dollars in building up capacity and enrolment and effectively doubling it.

The advent of the glass cockpit in aviation has revolutionized the kind of skills that are needed. By putting in glass cockpits for training purposes, again, it will enable the graduates of this program to leave job ready for a market anywhere in Newfoundland and Labrador, anywhere in Canada, and indeed I would argue anywhere in the world.

It has, as part of it though, integration with some of the other threads around the budget. The air service provider based in Gander has a proposal in through Municipal Affairs and Environment which will demonstrate that changing glass cockpit in all of their aircraft will actually reduce the carbon footprint of his organization by 350 metric tons a year—a significant improvement in a time when we are conscious of the impact on the environment. The biggest contributor to carbon footprint across the globe is, in actual fact, probably transportation as much as heavy industry.

So again, that integration between various facets of government shows the cohesive nature of *The*

*Way Forward* and the budget plan, as you just apply it in a very granular way to aviation.

In addition to that, there is another \$300,000 to invest in the structural component program, looking at bringing non-destructive testing in an aviation sphere to Gander. This is not to take away from any of the other areas that do non-destructive testing, but add a suite of skills peculiar to aviation which would, again, be a synergy, a partnership with the existing infrastructure at the CNA. That will position these graduates to be world leaders in their skill set.

The other area of investment that was highlighted in the budget is around Gander Academy. Gander Academy is one of the old schools built in the '50s and while, originally a K to six, is now being transformed into a K to three school. But it's being done in a way that recognizes the need for integration between schools and the rest of the community. So, one of the treasures of Gander Academy was an addition some years ago of a gymnasium which actually has a double-sized, full, competitive basketball court.

Were one simply to demolish that school and rebuild it, that asset would have been lost, and code today for a K to three school would have mandated a smaller court. It would have then produced challenges with the community in terms of hosting provincial and even national events in terms of basketball, for example.

The gym has 30 more years of shelf life left in it, so the plan around Gander Academy is to basically renovate the gym and rebuild the school in phases around it. So it will be up to code for the K to 3 students. It will be advanced in the same way that the newly opened Gander Elementary is with all the high-tech SMART Boards and electronic integration and the environmentally friendly nature of the building, but it keeps what is a gem which is the gymnasium there. Again, that highlights those integrations between our planning in education and our attempts to bring that across with municipal affairs and the community growth.

There are many other infrastructure investments there. There's significant highway and culvert work being done in Gambo, for example. In the

interest of time and trying to be reflective of the fact I have two hats at least to wear here, I'm not going to belabour that point, although I'll be happy to do so if an opportunity presents itself later.

From the department point of view, I find myself once again in the portfolio of Minister of Health and Community Services. Again, I thank the Premier for his confidence in me in putting back in a role that I held for 3½ years.

We have significant challenges and the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port alluded to some of those in his reply to the budget. So I'm just going to stand and speak a little bit about what is the big picture here. We do have the highest per capita health care expenditures of any province in Canada. We're well above the average.

What I have come to realize, however, during my time in this office is we are often comparing apples and oranges. If you look at this province west of Bellevue, we are a territory, we're not a province. We may have been Canada's newest province but, in actual fact, in some respects a territory.

If you look at our statistics, the data, the hard facts, if you look at population density, our population density as an average is 1.4 people per square kilometre. The Canadian national average is 3.4. If you look at Labrador, it is .09 people per square kilometre. We are a territory off the Avalon. If you then say well, how do we compare per capita with expenditure on health in the territories, we are the cheapest territory in Canada for health care per capita expenditure.

Not being content, however, with that, what I would also then do is draw comparisons with trends over what has happened over the last three years. If you look across the country at health care expenditure per capita – and these are CIHI figures, they're not mine. They're not manufactured or tinkered with in any way. They've come from the Canadian Institute for Health Information. The average rate of risk of per capita health expenditure in Canada is around 4.6 per cent. If you look at our average rate of rise, it is 0.8 per cent.

If you look at the rate of inflation over that period, it varies between 1.6 and 2.4 per cent.

So, in other words, we have held our health care expenditure per capita lower than the rate of inflation consistently for the last three years. I don't think there are many jurisdictions that you can point to where that has been achieved.

But, at the same time as doing that, we have not seen a reduction in services. Indeed, I would argue, we have seen a significant increase in services. There are outcome measures there and I would be happy to talk about our focused successes through the *Towards Recovery*, an action plan for mental health and addictions in Newfoundland and Labrador.

We have zero wait times for cancelling in some areas. We have the Doorways program rolling out across the province. We have put mental health on a new footing as a provincial program. We have addictions hubs rolling out across the province. We have a new model of addiction service delivery featured on Bell Island. This has been in response to a refocusing of mental health services around the needs of individuals to make it person-centred in the way that Members opposite have referenced.

In actual fact, we are unique in Atlantic Canada in having a Recovery Council. What that is for new Members and people who may not have come across that term, it is a group of people with lived experience, either directly or through a close family member, who are constituted with direct access to the minister – unfiltered.

Indeed, I commend the Lieutenant-Governor for having a round-table event in the early part of spring, if one could call it that, maybe even late winter, at Government House, where self-identified mental health and addictions consumers/clients got together with Her Honour, and I was invited as an observer to sit and listen to these experiences. They've highlighted where we have succeeded, but, as is always the case, they've highlighted areas where we need to continue to focus and move ahead.

I think, again, to go back to the per capita expenditure highlighting, there's been no reduction in services. What does that mean for this province? Well, it means that in a measured, steady way, just as our budget will bring us back to a financial surplus on a schedule that was set

in 2016, we have a schedule of our own in health.

If you look at the lines as drawn by the information from CIHI over time, those lines about our per capita expenditure on health and the rest of Canada will actually cross sometime between '24 and '25. We will no longer be the dearest. We will, in actual fact, have gone into the middle of the pack, and we will certainly have reached a yardstick that was set to me as a goal in my initial mandate letter, which was to bring our per capita health expenditure in line with the rest of Canada.

Again, I would still argue that whilst I am using the same yardstick that the Opposition have, which is we are a province that in actual fact, west of Fair Haven, half our population lives in a territory. On that criteria, we have not made any excuses for our geography. We have continued to hold the line with fiscally responsible approaches to health. And that leads me in my closing remarks just to comment, really, about some of the language that we've heard here and outside in the scrum area about reprioritizing in line with what the populace, the people of this province actually want.

There are difficult decisions to be made in government about how money is allocated. If one works on the principle that we are committed to no new fees and taxes, we have a relationship with our bond rating agencies which essentially has said that borrowing is something that we have capped out on for the time being, then really and honestly, what you give to one area of program delivery, by definition you have to take from somewhere else.

I would argue that reprioritizing, as a term, has actually significant implications for other groups who have not been as vocal perhaps, or whose needs may not have become as topical in the last little while, and we really have to be careful what we mean when we talk about reprioritizing. Because, quite frankly, that will be seen by groups as synonymous, as identical with cutting, because there is no way you can slice a fixed pie without cutting from one and giving to another. If you want to increase the pie, that's a whole different discussion.

Yes, we have federal health transfers. Yes, we have been to the feds and argued very clearly – very clearly – that when Medicare was conceived, we had 50-cent dollars from the feds. We now have 17-cent dollars from the feds. That has been a process that has been engineered by successive federal governments, over the wishes of every province and every territory.

It does not belong to the Trudeau Liberals; and, to be fair, it probably doesn't belong to the Harper Conservatives solely, either. Although, there was certainly some machinations there in 2010 and 2012 which made our life a lot harder. The Members opposite have referenced that these transfers are now done on a per capita basis. Well, you can thank Stephen Harper for that, and the fact that no one from this table got to that table.

So, the next worrying thing is pharmacare. I am a great proponent of pharmacare, national pharmacare. The report is coming out today, and we have not seen it. What I am worried about now is that exactly the same thing will happen in pharmacare as happened with Medicare. It will start with 50- or 60-cent dollars from the feds and within five years it'll be down to 20-cent dollars, and we will go from spending \$149 million on drugs for clients for whom we have a responsibility, to our estimates of \$450 million, at a time when we cannot afford to do that. We simply do not have the financial or the fiscal reserves.

I'm looking forward, Mr. Speaker, to the discussions in Estimates. I'm looking forward to discussions with my colleagues from the opposite side of the House about how we can make health care more sustainable and an even better quality. Because at the end of all this, I think it's really appropriate to close on the fact that we have the best health care professionals in Canada.

What is lost in this narrative is the fact that we lead the country in standards of care around laryngeal cancer, around cancer care for cancer in the prostate. There are islands of excellence that go unremarked because it is not fashionable to talk about the things we do well. We are very bad as a province at highlighting the things we do well, we let others take the narrative.

So, Mr. Speaker, with that I'll take my seat. I would commend this budget to the House. It is sustainable, it is responsible and it moves us further down a road that the population of this province have clearly shown us they want us to go.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MS. COFFIN:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

It is truly an honour to be able to rise and speak to the budget, something that I have been studying for quite some time. I have a great appreciation for the depth of experience and the great deal of knowledge that each individual MHA brings to this House, and I'd like to add a little bit more to that.

I'd like to expand on the Budget Speech that we heard from the Minister of Finance. I'd also like to add a little bit from the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port. I'd like to expand on a few other things there; but, at the same time, I want to, in my speech now, to weave in a number of other issues that we're hearing.

Certainly, we're seeing a number of issues that were addressed in the budget. We've certainly seen a number of issues that are coming up in the Auditor General's report. I'm also hearing some wonderful things from my colleagues here in the House of Assembly. So I want to capture some of that and build this into what I'm going to say. I also want to reiterate what we are hearing at the doors, because we are hearing a wealth of information. One of our roles here is to be able to take the information that we're hearing at the doors and turn that into sound, fiscal policy.

So, what I would like to speak to today – well, we're talking about the budget. The budget is simply a point-in-time document. A budget reflects what government's intentions are and it sets the groundwork for its policy intentions and direction; however, the budget is a one-year snapshot. It does have companion documents

that help frame the economic and social circumstances in which we are building that budget, and I'd like to go into some of those things in a fair bit of detail.

Before I do, though, I think it's very, very important to point out that there are numerous similarities across all platforms that we saw presented during this election. I'd like to point out that it exemplifies the need for collaboration and co-operation, and the fact that if we all have the same and similar ideals in our platform, that certainly reflects what the wishes of the people who elected us are.

One of the things we need to do in the context of this budget is to look at the difference between the short-term goals we are trying to achieve – and we have to remember, that right now we are already a quarter of the way through our fiscal year. The ability to change the budget is somewhat constrained.

I think that at this point, if we are going to talk about any changes to our budget in these discussions and our deliberations and Estimates, we do need to think about, well, what are some of the short-term things we can achieve that do reflect the party policies that we saw in the election. In those things we can talk about small changes, perhaps, to allocations within departments, but, at the same time, I think we need to focus on ideas that will bring value to the people who elected us by way of legislative changes that will help enhance and protect our citizens.

From a longer term perspective, again, remembering that the budget is a point-in-time document, what we want to do is plan for longer term issues. Certainly, many of the strong things that we are seeing happening in our economy transcend a yearly budget. Some of these things take two years, three years, five years. Some of these will be generational. So we need to have a view, when we build our budget, of the implications well into the future.

In that context, I think we need to balance the need to build and grow our economy and improve and strengthen our society. These are absolutely vital. However, we have to do that in the context of the fiscal constraints which we are



facing and the social context in which we are operating.

In particular, one of the things that are very imminent for us right now is the bond-rating agencies have insisted upon a plan to return to surplus in the very near future and, certainly, the intent seems to be that we want to return there in the 2021-2022 budget – forgive me, that might be 2022-2023 budget. However, in the context of returning to surplus we do have a number of key factors that are utterly outside our control.

So this will certainly curtail our ability to reach budget surplus. In particular, the price of oil, upon which we depend quite significantly, is outside of our control. And in fact, to exemplify that, over the last week we have seen the price of oil drop from a high of about \$75 per barrel to today it's trending at about \$60 a barrel. This will have a substantial effect on our ability to meet our obligations. I have serious concerns about that.

Simultaneously, the price of oil is often given in US dollars; that means that we are susceptible to any changes in the exchange rate. So that means that any changes in the Canadian economy, any changes in the United States economy, but also changes in the global economy will affect our ability to meet our fiscal needs and plans. So we need to be acutely aware of that.

Additionally, we have the concern of interest rates. Domestic interest rates are set by the Bank of Canada, which is set based on the economic context of Canada, which is often vastly different from that of Newfoundland and Labrador. So we can see a burgeoning economy in the Canadian economy, we would be facing higher interest rates, and that of course will affect our ability to borrow, and then again our ability to repay that. Since the Bank of Canada is talking about an increase in interest rates, we need to be very aware of the effect of that on our budget.

That leads me to the Auditor General's report. In the context of the Auditor General's report this is absolutely vital that we pay attention to this, because the Auditor General's report is a non-partisan document that clearly articulates our financial situation. In the Auditor General's report, you will find that there are three key

indicators that they address. One of which is vulnerability. Vulnerability goes to how susceptible we are to factors beyond our control. In the context of that, the Auditor General very clearly lays out the fact that the price of oil, the exchange rate and the interest rate are outside of our control and our budget process is outside of our ability to influence that, and that has a significant impact.

In fact, when you read the Auditor General's report, you will find an unfortunate and alarming use of the words "a deteriorating trend," whether it be upward or downward, consistently throughout the document the Auditor General says we are facing a deteriorating trend in those key indicators, and we need to be acutely aware of the importance of that in the context of our spending.

Similarly, the other indicators that the Auditor General points out are sustainability and flexibility. So the three key indicators that the Auditor General reports on are: sustainability, flexibility, vulnerability. Vulnerability, we are very vulnerable, as I have just mentioned. Sustainability, to give the definition of that, it is whether a government is living within its means. You will note that we are borrowing \$1.2 billion this year as proposed in the budget and if you wanted to have a greater look at what the level of borrowing has been and what we can be expected to repay over the next little while, you'll find in the back of the budget document a very clear outline of the amount of borrowing that we have, when we borrowed and when that debt will come due.

If you look very carefully at it, during our term of office, there are hundreds of millions of dollars that will come due and we are going to be expected to pay that and we need to ensure that our budget addresses that in this context – very important.

Flexibility: Flexibility refers to whether a government can meet the rising commitments by expanding revenues or increasing debt. Now, thus far, we have not been able to expand our revenues, unless we see an increase in the production of oil, a factor outside our control, or the price of oil, another factor outside of our control. So again, as you read through the Auditor General's report, you will find repetition

of “this is a deteriorating trend.” So we are no longer sustainable, we are not flexible and we very, very vulnerable.

So as we contemplate the needs and endless list of the things that we would like to see the provincial government fund here in our province, we must ensure that that is done in the context of these very serious concerns of our Auditor General. I think that it’s very important that everyone has the opportunity to make themselves familiar with the context of this report because our deliberations absolutely depend on that.

*The Economy*: We noted yesterday there were a number of issues, a number of references to the provincial indicators in our economy. I’d like to point out that *The Economy*, again, a non-partisan document that accurately reflects the state of our economy, just a simple thing to point out right now but as you’ll find on page 11, real GDP and employment growth. I’d just like to point out that Newfoundland and Labrador is doing well this year at 1.9 per cent growth. Excellent, we are almost leading the country in growth.

You’ll note that BC has a 2.2 rate of growth, so they’re doing slightly better than us, and we’re comparable to a number of other, similar economies. However, much of that was out of our control. It is largely dependent on our investment in megaprojects and the associated employment and revenues generated as a result of that, but also it is associated with the price of oil and the production of oil; again, factors outside of our control.

If one was to look at the provincial economic indicators, I can roll off these stats, but far more important is the intent of these and the implication of these, so it’s how we interpret these. So if you look across the provincial economic indicators, what you’ll find – 2017, 2018, we saw a deteriorating trend. We actually saw reductions in gross domestic product, which is how much money our economy generates, but also in household income with things like retail sales and investment in housing stats, and yes, it is laudable that most of these indicators will improve this year. However, it is a spike in point of time.

What we are going to see in the coming years, gross domestic product, and very carefully you must watch the difference between a nominal number and a real number; a real number means how inflation is going to affect our ability, so this is the sting or the bite that we find, or what we call in economics, a purchasing power. So, what we see is as inflation goes up, even though our GDP is going up, that GDP is going up predominantly because production is going up and the price of oil is going up.

What is actually happening to our households, household disposable income is going to go down in real terms. So that means when we go to the store and buy a bag of groceries, the amount of stuff that we put in that bag of groceries is going to get smaller and smaller and smaller. We are going to be less able to afford the things that we need to survive here, and that is very disconcerting. That means that we are not meeting the needs of the people of this province.

Retail sales, the things upon which we rely, we are going to see a decrease in real terms of retail sales. That means all our small businesses, as well as our larger businesses, are going to see a reduction in their incomes. That ought to be very concerning as well.

Likewise, employment changes will drop off again next year. What we’re seeing again is a spike in infrastructure projects and investment projects, but that drops off again. So we need to be extra cautious about how we use our statistics.

Similarly, the unemployment rate and our population – the unemployment rates are going back up again; our population is declining. We are getting older and there are going to be less of us, which are going to have significant impacts on our ability to provide public services, on our income, as well as the ability to take care of the people who took care of us: our seniors.

In that context, these are the economic numbers. The stuff that we are talking about on the door – when I hear my colleagues and hon. Members beside me talking about what they’re hearing on the door, how they want better home care, how they want better affordability. They want more jobs.

What we are talking about is the social fabric of our economy. So if you want to look at, yet, another non-partisan document, Vital Signs is quite remarkable. It does, too, provide a snapshot in time; however, it gives us a good sense of some of the social issues which we are facing.

For example, the first numbers that I looked at today – in Newfoundland, how confident are we in our economy? What we are seeing is Newfoundlanders are, compared to our Atlantic counterparts, less likely to make a major purchase, more concerned about the cost of living and very insecure about employment. These are very disconcerting facts and it means that the faith in the economy is not there. That means people are not going to stay in this province. They're not going to have children in this province. They are not going to raise families in this province. Businesses are not going to come to this province. So we need to address the confidence in our economy.

A couple of other quick things that are interesting. Let's see here, food bank usage: Newfoundland compared to Canada, we use it at twice the rate; 5 per cent of Newfoundlanders use food banks and, of those 5 per cent, we are seeing 37 out of every 100 are children and 56 out of every 100 are adults under the age of 65. These are grown adults who cannot manage to afford or are capable of getting food for themselves. That ought to be very disconcerting as well. Seven out of every 100 are seniors. This goes to the affordability of seniors and their abilities to even stay in their homes or be contributing members of society – again, disconcerting facts.

In these contexts, we ought to be very aware of some other things that you're not finding in many of this, but we have heard them on the doors. I don't know if anyone else has heard this, but I spoke to an 80-plus-year-old grandmother in Spaniard's Bay recently who told me she knows how to boil down a morphine patch to be able to get the opioids out. She said: Why do I need to know this at 80? Well, she knows this because her grandson is in the throws of an opioid addiction. This is wrong. We see grandmothers who have to take time out of their retirement to dedicate their lives to their

grandchildren because there's a generation being scourged by the ravages of opioid addiction.

Other things we are hearing on the doorstep: Gangs are becoming more prevalent on our economy. The sex work in our economy is growing. These are social issues that have come with the boom that we recently saw. So poor planning – when we look at booms in our economy and huge investments are going to generate massive amounts of money also come with negative implications.

And if we do not address them as we go forward and plan more megaprojects, we are going to find a consistent, persistent, pervasive use of gangs, opioids and we are going to see sex work and these things are going to continue to grow. This will affect our mental health, this affects our community capacity and this affects our day-to-day lives. This is a serious, serious concern.

In addition to this, in the context of our budget, we have a number of significant issues on the horizon. These can be potentially problems; they could potentially be good things. We have first power coming from Muskrat Falls. That is on the horizon – wonderful if we have clean energy; however, the affordability of that clean energy may be compromised. We need a plan to address the affordability of Muskrat Falls, and that is not contained in our budget. That will, I'm sure, consume an enormous amount of our deliberations over time.

In addition, the integrity of the North Spur is something that I do not want on my conscience, nor I'm sure does any other MHA want that on their conscience. We need to be very clear and very assured that that North Spur will not fail.

Labour negotiations are on the horizon as well. If you remember the last labour negotiations got a lot of money off government's books by paying out severance – fabulous. That means our debt looks a little bit better; however, that certainty is not there for our public servants, and this very timely, given it's Public Service Week. But, at the same time, we're seeing that in our P3 contracts, we're guaranteeing an escalation of 2 per cent per year; however, our public servants have been fixed at zero per cent per year. So you will see our brothers and sisters in labour looking for wages negotiations, wage increases

in the coming years. In our term of office, this will be an issue which we will have to address.

Simultaneously, we will need to look at climate change. This is pervasive, this is immediate and this will have significant impacts on how we do business, as well as the implications for some of the costs in our budget.

We need to talk about transparency and accountability. Transparency, we can no longer have dollars being given to numbered companies. The public purse is not to be allocated out with any accountability, that is abhorrent and we ought to fix that rather immediately. At the same time, we need to be accountable for any poor policy outcomes that we have.

I do look forward to sitting with the Minister for the Status of Women to talk about the gender lens that is being used on the budget, versus what I would like to call a more substantive gender analysis of the budget that reflects the implications of spending on women. We also need to focus on prevention.

So, yes, in conclusion, I like to see collaboration, I think that collective responsibility means that we need to address all of the issues that I addressed and fiscally, prudently and in a very socially responsible manner look to balancing our budget, but do that in ensuring that we have the most knowledge possible.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

**MS. P. PARSONS:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and congratulations, of course, on your new role.

It certainly is great to be back here in the House of Assembly. Firstly, I'd like to start by thanking the constituents of the strong District of Harbour Grace - Port de Grave. Of course, a district that I'm very proud of and I'm very humbled and I'm very grateful to receive their support again to be their representative. I'm happy to say in

our past term, working together, we're getting things done in Harbour Grace - Port de Grave District.

A big thank you to the constituents there. Again, they're my first priority with this work and I look forward to working with them, continuing to getting great results.

Also, I want to thank my volunteers. We've all come through, of course, an election campaign. It was held in the spring of the year, but you'd swear it was the fall or the winter because the snow and the sleet and the rain, the sideways rain and the wind. It didn't stop us though. We can't sit around, of course, in this province and wait for the sun to shine to get out and to get things done. So, again, a big thank you to volunteers who've come together on my campaign, and, of course, across the province.

I know, Mr. Speaker, there was some concern for voter apathy coming up in this election. Well, I can tell you, there was no voter apathy in the District of Harbour Grace - Port de Grave. We actually had the second highest voter turnout, second to the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis. Again, thanks to our voters for getting out and doing their part for our democracy, for Newfoundland and Labrador. Everybody has a stake here in this province, our province. We have a beautiful province. In my opinion, we've got the best province in Canada, and let's all work together as a team.

I see the province as a big team, just as here in the House of Assembly. This is a different climate, Mr. Speaker. Apparently, it's the first time we've had a minority government since 1971. I'm particularly excited to see how this is all going to unfold and work. I'm a political science major in university prior to my journalism, so it's something that I've studied and I'm very excited to see it at play.

I want to congratulate everybody here, all 40 Members here in the House of Assembly, for making it here. As our Lieutenant-Governor said recently, congratulations for putting yourself forward, to step up and to serve the public. First and foremost, that needs to be commended, and congratulations. I see around the room we've got a variety of talent; lots of great different backgrounds, of course.

I want to congratulate the Leader of the Third Party, who is also a friend of mine and a fellow ball hockey teammate. So I look forward to certainly working with you, and Members on all sides of the House, the Official Opposition and, of course, my colleagues here on this side of the House. We're going to work together, I'm confident in that.

Every time I've spoken publicly since the election I've said, I'm very confident that every Member who has been elected to this hon. House has been here – they put their names forward, they're elected here and I know they're going to do the best on behalf of the people who have represented them.

So on that note, now I also want to recognize our wonderful public servants here throughout the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. It is Public Service Week, and I have a lot of great workers in my district, in Harbour Grace - Port de Grave, from the departments of Children, Seniors and Social Development, motor vehicle registration, which falls under Service NL, also Eastern Health of course, and for the Department of Transportation and Works.

We have a robust depot in Bay Roberts. I want to thank those public servants for everything they do on behalf of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, because they're out in all kinds of weather. You take the people who are clearing our roads and doing our road maintenance, especially in the treacherous winter months we have. So a big thank you from the bottom of my heart to our public servants in Harbour Grace - Port de Grave District, and across Newfoundland and Labrador.

Of course, it's that time of year again; it's not Christmas, Mr. Speaker, but it is budget time. It's certainly a prominent time of year here in the House of Assembly. It means for a lot of late nights.

I want to also congratulate the Department of Justice on putting forward the great Estimates session last night. We were here until just before 10 o'clock, actually, getting things done and going through the line. This is where the transparency and the accountability and the working together comes in. I want to thank the Members also who took part in that last night.

So we look forward to getting that done. It's going to be a long few weeks but that's what we're here for. We've been elected to do this work on behalf of the people.

Also, I want to talk about something that is very near and dear to my heart. It's a big budget item in this year's budget, in particular, for the District of Harbour Grace - Port de Grave, and that is the long overdue replacement for Coley's Point Primary school. Those of you who are new, and if you haven't heard me talk about Coley's Point Primary school, you're certainly going to – you're going to hear this this whole session, because, of course, we heard a lot about it in the last term.

I'm happy to say, Mr. Speaker, it's this government listening to the people in this region – for more than a decade. This school is over 60 years old. We have a bursting population of students in that school's community. Coley's Point Primary school services children from Port de Grave, Bareneed, Shearstown, Butlerville, Bay Roberts and Coley's Point. Even some kids from Clarke's Beach attend school at Coley's Point.

I'm happy to say that construction for the new Coley's Point is underway; \$16.2 million has been awarded by this government to the company JMJ Holdings, a local Newfoundland and Labrador company, and work is underway. I've been out to the site a couple of times to view the work that's happening there and to chat with some of the workers on-site; practicing safety, of course, at the same time. I'm happy to say things are underway.

Now, just a little update from the department, to inform my constituents in the District of Harbour Grace - Port de Grave, the latest on Coley's Point. About 80 per cent of the site work, which is the clearing and the grading, is complete. The contractor is now preparing frameworks for footings and the concrete is soon due to be poured.

Coley's Point Primary school, as I mentioned, valued at \$16.2 million, has been awarded to JMJ Holdings. It's a single-story building. It's going to be featuring eighteen –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**MS. P. PARSONS:** Yeah, \$16.2 million. That's right, Minister.

Featuring 18 classrooms, a gymnasium, a music room, of course, a cafeteria and other required amenities. So we're very excited about this, because currently those young students out there are eating at their desks, they're eating in their classrooms. They don't have a proper cafeteria, but I have to give credit to that school community, the parents, the teachers, the young students, for what they have, they're certainly doing a lot of great things for what we have to use right now. The resources that we do have out there.

I also want to commend the people, Mr. Speaker, because being politicians, being MHAs, we're working directly with the people. It's our job to represent what's important to the people in our districts. Our priorities, our concerns, even if it's – we're not going to be able to grant every wish. We don't have that magic wand that we often wish we had, but our job is to do what we can on their behalf and to be vocal and to work with our departments, our ministers, Members on all sides of the House, because that's what this is about. Ultimately, we're here for the betterment of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

So I certainly want to commend the people of that region and Bay Roberts that made it quite clear, this has been a priority for quite some time. It's been overlooked for too long, but I'm happy to say things are getting done. They're happening now, and it's our government that's delivering that new school, with the opening date for early 2021. I can't wait, Mr. Speaker, and I invite everybody who wants to come and be a part of this, because it certainly is going to be a great big deal in the District of Harbour Grace - Port de Grave. So we're very happy about that.

Also, I want to talk about some work that's been happening on the Veterans Memorial Highway. Oftentimes, Mr. Speaker, the Veterans Memorial Highway makes news headlines, but not for great reasons. Unfortunately, there have been many fatalities on that highway. Just this past week there was a pedestrian accident. Thank God, I'm told that that person is in hospital recovering. But we need to do more, and we've

been listening. That's a priority in this region, Route 75, the Veterans Memorial Highway.

Our government has invested over \$5 million over this past couple of years. Construction is ongoing, and that's to include rumble strips, include climbing lanes. As we know, the Veterans Memorial Highway is not a divided highway. It's like the Trans-Canada, the speed limit is 100, but, again, it's not divided. And given its geography and where it's located, there are a lot of moose.

Mr. Speaker, I remember one night, just last year, actually, when the House was in session in November. It was a dark night, and I was travelling out on a Thursday evening from the House of Assembly to an event in my district in Harbour Grace, and I came pretty close to a moose. A great big moose was right in the middle of that road.

So we have to do our part as motorists to be diligent and to adhere to the weather conditions. It was a wet, dark night that night. I can remember, I stopped abruptly, I saw the moose. Mr. Speaker, the distance was less from you to me away. Actually, that's how close it was. I stopped and I put on my emergency lights, but the driver behind me swerved out and passed. I stopped for a reason clearly, and that driver almost hit that animal. So, again, we have to do our part to protect ourselves and each other on that highway.

I'm happy to say safety improvements are being made on the Veterans Memorial. For example, currently work on 14 culverts. They're being replaced, ongoing throughout the summer. The tender for rumble strips is to be issued this summer when the paving is complete. Those rumble strips, of course, are going to wake up drivers. If it's late at night and they're driving and they veer over to the centre of the road, you're going to get that loud noise that's going to make you alert and remind you that you've got to stay in your lane to protect yourself and oncoming drivers. The grading is expected to be complete in a few weeks. Paving to follow in July, Mr. Speaker. The climbing lanes, it's a cost-shared project with the federal government, and that's anticipated to be complete at the end of July.

So, good things happening, and this comes as a direct result of listening to the people. That's what we have to do. We have to listen to what the concerns are. We have to, of course, utilize the officials in each department. They're the professionals that we rely on to provide us with the facts and the information, the best information going forward and how we can improve Newfoundland and Labrador overall. Things are happening.

Also moving on now, I want to talk about the Port de Grave Peninsula. We've got big investments happening in there now because, as we know, we've got a gem in tourism in Newfoundland and Labrador. It's one of the biggest industries that we have. Everywhere we go – I just was on a flight recently and I was happy to see an ad, a beautiful ad featuring Newfoundland and Labrador attracting people to our province. I give the credit to my colleague, the Minister of Tourism. I know he's very enthusiastic about the videos and about everything that we see in tourism, but it's great to see.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**MS. P. PARSONS:** It's great to see that when we travel – what I'm saying, my friend across the way here who is chirping, from the beautiful District of Cape St. Francis, it's great to see Newfoundland and Labrador featured on these ads and on these videos, the actual Newfoundland and Labrador featured on videos. It's good to see and attract people. Everywhere we go, we're known as unique people here in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Port de Grave Peninsula Heritage Society – I'm happy to say, working with my colleague, MP Ken McDonald, who is a very hard worker, I got to give him credit as well for the riding of Avalon which he represents. Poor Ken, I tell you, he gets around to as many events as he can and, as we know, federal ridings are much larger than provincial districts but we do what we can. So, together, we were happy to announce \$154,000 to be invested in the Green Point Light Station in Port de Grave to develop Port de Grave and this particular peninsula as a world-renowned heritage site and tourist attraction. And it's happening. There's some great work happening down there.

I invite all hon. Members, if you're looking for a place, a staycation this year in Newfoundland and Labrador, come on out to Port de Grave. A staycation, invest right here. I mean, there are lots of great parts in our province to visit. I know I certainly haven't seen the whole province yet and we're larger geographically than the Maritimes combined. We're bigger than Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and PEI here in Newfoundland and Labrador, our geography, and we've got vast glories we have to celebrate here in the province. I certainly invite people to come on out and see what we've got going.

In the winter months, you can come out to the boat lighting which is happening. This is also a world-famous event now, the boat lighting in Port de Grave. As we know, Port de Grave is a significant harbour. Many berths, many ships and vessels, fishing vessels from across our province berth in Port de Grave. And the money that comes in over the wharf annually in Port de Grave is not to be reckoned with. It's second to none.

You leave and any day you can go down and have a walk out on the wharf and talk to the fish harvesters. They can tell you what it's like being on the water, what's happening, what the catch is of the day and all that fun stuff. So we have a great district in Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

Also in Harbour Grace now a big project that we're looking for and that we know is under way and we've approved here at the provincial government for the Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment, it has now gone to Ottawa as a cost share, and that's the repairing of Harvey Street in Harbour Grace. Harvey Street is a major thoroughfare through the town, and even through the area there. People all throughout the Conception Bay North region utilize Harvey Street.

At one time, Mr. Speaker, Harbour Grace was going to be the capital of Newfoundland and Labrador, until it was destroyed by fire. That was some years ago, but I certainly wish that outcome wasn't the reality, but it is. But Harbour Grace is a beautiful, historic town.

Lots of great things happening, they're gearing up there now for their Come Home Year next summer. Beautiful, a lot of history, and I want to

commend the volunteers out there. In particular, the heritage group that's come together now. They work with the museum, and I'm happy to say that we were able to recently announce just over \$21,000 to repair a part of the museum for the stairs at Colston's Cove Stairs.

So lots of small projects happening. But do you know what? No matter what the size of these projects, it's enhancing our communities, and it's made possible by the dedication of the people in our districts. So I'm happy to say – and I just made that phone call to one of the members out there, of course, on the board for the museum – that it is just under \$22,000 now in investment to go and to repair these stairs that enhances our museum, because we're expecting a lot of visitors.

And another reason we're expecting a lot of visitors to the District of Harbour Grace - Port de Grace is for the first time in our history the Town of Bay Roberts, another big, beautiful hub historic town – I argue it's the hub of the bay, Conception Bay North. My colleague and my friend from the neighbouring district probably would have something different to say, but Bay Roberts is the hub of the bay, Mr. Speaker. That's right, here he is; he's hearing me now.

For the first time in our history, Bay Roberts is going to host the Newfoundland and Labrador 2020 Summer Games. It's the most prestigious, large-scale, provincial sporting event that we can host here in our province. The infrastructure – I have to give the credit as well to the municipality, the Town of Bay Roberts. The infrastructure that they have, it's a great town, it's a wonderful, functioning town. Residents in that town are very happy with the amenities that we have, and I got to say it's their time and I'm happy to help make that happen. Again, it's team work. It's working together.

One of the priorities that the recreation director made clear to me upon my mandate when I first became the MHA for the area: Pam, we've applied for years and years to get a games here. We want to host a games here. We've got the infrastructure, we've got the baseball fields and we've got the stadium. We're now building beach volleyball courts. We've got the tennis courts, we've got the soccer pitches, we've got it all here and there's no reason why we can't do

this. We want to, we're a big sports hub, the neighbouring Town of Harbour Grace is also a sports capital in Newfoundland and Labrador and I'm happy to say it's happening now.

Ian Flynn, my friend and recreation director, has presented that application. By working together with the minister as well the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development, I proudly had my colleague out last year, we made that announcement for the Summer Games. I remember the minister's words. She said: I can't believe we haven't hosted before. Because we have everything right here on our doorstep, but it's happening now and we're getting things done. So, thousands are expected to visit the District of Harbour Grace - Port de Grave in Bay Roberts for the Summer Games next year, and I'm happy to say in this budget, as well, the support from our Premier, the departments where we just announced a \$200,000 operating grant to support this sporting event here in the district.

And it's not just the Town of Bay Roberts that's going to benefit, it's the neighbouring communities of Conception Bay North. For example, another great town, Upper Island Cove in my district, they have a beautiful baseball facility down there. We've also helped and supported them in constructing a walking track, not just for the athletes but for the people of that town, the seniors, the younger children, you name it. Everybody's utilizing this beautiful community enhancement, this walking track, and we're going to be using that ball field for the Summer Games.

Also in the neighbouring district over in Pitcher's Pond, the golf course is also going to be utilized, the Carbonear pool is going to be utilized. So it's a team effort, literally, and no pun intended there with the team, with the sporting event, but we're all going to benefit.

Tourism is going to benefit. People are going to come to Port de Grave. They're going to want to see our new lighthouse, the Green Point Light Station which is down there. It's becoming an iconic lighthouse here in the region, on the Port de Grave Peninsula. So again, there are lots of things happening. Businesses are going to benefit, the RV parks are going to benefit, the restaurants out there are going to benefit and we



have a lot of great things happening in the District of Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

Absolutely, it's the volunteers, as my colleague just mentioned – he often talks about the volunteers in his district as well, but it's volunteers that make these things happen. Money goes a long way, but you need the dedication of the people and the passion and the pride that they show. So I am very confident that we are going to host a beautiful Summer Games. Our volunteer base out there is second to none, the co-chair is the principal, actually, of Ascension Collegiate high school, we've also got good friend Judy Morrow, who's also co-chairing, and a number of committees and people who have come together. They're going to put off, arguably, I'm going to say it's going to be the best games that Newfoundland and Labrador has ever seen, here at the Summer Games in 2020.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MS. P. PARSONS:** I also want to throw a big thank you and appreciation out to our volunteer firefighters. There's not enough I can say about these people, these men and women, these brave men and women, because when the rest of us are running out seeking shelter and safety, it's these men and women who are running in, our first responders.

We've got great dedicated volunteer firefighters throughout the District of Harbour Grace - Port de Grave. I'm happy our government also – working with those volunteers, just last fall our government worked with the Town of Upper Island Cove to deliver a new medical rescue fire unit truck, valued at about, give or take, a half million dollars. In Upper Island Cove they respond to a lot of medical calls because of their unique geography. They also look after the Towns of Bishop's Cove and Bryant's Cove.

So this is a perfect example. We are definitely following difficult economic times; arguably, the most challenging in our history. In spite of all this, by working together I'm confident we're getting things done. Mr. Speaker, things are happening in the District of Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

It's always an honour to stand here in my place and represent the strong people, the beautiful people of my district. Anything I can ever do to help, please call my contingency office, 786-1372. We're located at 1 Excel Place in Bay Roberts. Anything we can do to help, we certainly will do our best.

On that note, Mr. Speaker, I will take my place and I look forward to debate.

Thank you very much.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. PARDY:** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to some budgetary items and express some thoughts this morning, some of which I received at the doors in the District of Bonavista, and others based on my career in education.

Firstly, following the lead of my colleague from the Cape St. Francis area, I, too, would like to thank the wonderful people of the District of Bonavista for this wonderful opportunity. I realized after a week into the campaign that I was a winner, regardless of the election night results, getting to meet some wonderful people in the District of Bonavista, many of whom I hadn't met before.

Just as a little side note; the tea, fresh buns and conversation was awesome. And, to nobody's surprise in the District of Bonavista, I had fish on one occasion as well. It was great.

In education, we often say the same is not always better. We use it in our staff meetings. It's said that if you are doing the same as what you always did, chances are you're off track.

Yesterday, we heard a wonderful statement from the Member for Placentia - St. Mary's when she talked about her two children, the same does not work. I would say the education system would use that as one of their foundational principles. I would think budgetary wise we ought to take heed with that as well. If you're doing things the same over a great period of time, chances are you are off track and unfair.

When I did my graduate studies in the mid '80s, I did a graduate course from then Phil Warren. It was a fantastic class. On one particular class, the then – I stand to be corrected, I think the deputy minister at the time was Lorne Wheeler, who came in for a discussion, and what a great discussion. What I remembered most about that discussion on education was the fact that education in the mid '80s was the greatest expenditure in the provincial budget, but both of them concurred that that was soon going to lose out to health.

Well, in 1989 and '90 – which may be a little longer than what those learned gentlemen had thought – is when health surpassed education. Just to let you know what the figures were at that time: education was 23.1 per cent of the budget, \$653 million; health was 22.8 per cent of the budget, \$644 million.

In 1991 is when education fell into second place. I'm not saying it competitively, I'm just saying it for a point. When I get to the end, you'll see how it's all tied together. In education at that time, 23.6 per cent, we had \$707 million; education was 23.8, \$712 million in our expenditures.

With today's budget, education is \$836 million-and-some, health is over \$3 billion. Many believe, myself included, that good investment in education significantly improves the mental and physical health, reducing future health cost. We believe it as teachers, we believe it as parents, that if we invest in education it saves in health costs going forward.

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in 2016 stated, that 70 per cent of the mental illnesses have their onset during childhood or adolescence. I personally challenge MHAs on both sides to view initiatives in our education system that successfully curb and diminish health care demands, and thus its cost.

Again, in 2019, the Budget Speech delivered by the Finance Minister on Tuesday, April 16, it stated on page 30 that the government is making transformative changes in education. I look forward to the Education and Early Childhood Development Estimates Committee meeting on Tuesday, June 25, to hear these transformational changes.

Many of you are doing the math. You would know from 1990 to current, a mere three decades, education has increased 18 per cent in its expenditure. Health has increased 337 per cent.

In the 2019 Budget Speech, and yesterday the Finance Minister referenced it as well, new educational infrastructure, it was on page 44: Paradise elementary school; Gander Academy – that the Member for Gander so appropriately mentioned a little earlier; Coley's Point Elementary – which is wonderful; and a new school in St. Alban's.

When making transformative changes in education, I immediately become curious if there has been accommodations to have as part of this new construction, what are the sizes of the gymnasiums that we want children to be active in in a Northern climate. I'm pleased that the Minister of Health, the Member for Gander, had referenced that this particular gymnasium in Gander had two separate bays that could be divided.

I was fortunate enough in Clarendville, in the District of Terra Nova, to be at Clarendville Middle School where we had three large gymnasiums that could be separated with two curtains that we could have three groups of children engaged and active in our Northern climate.

Schools in the District of Bonavista, like Anthony Paddon in Musgravetown, Clarendville Middle School, Heritage Collegiate in Lethbridge, Discovery Collegiate and Matthew Elementary in Bonavista, were constructed with no outside recreational areas for children to play and be active on during the school year. If we are doing the same today, I would believe it to be a grave mistake. I would think that we're probably contributing to an even greater increase in the health care costs into the future. We need to invest and make sure we can curb those rather large figures in the health care cost.

So the question would be on the four schools – the Members spoke proudly of theirs – do they have recreational areas that would be available for children to play? Is that part of capital budget of which we are operating on now? If it's not, that is a shame and it is a disservice to the

children of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador going forward. I believe, as do I'm sure many of our colleagues believe, that healthier, more active students make better learners, a great investment for reducing health care costs, in addition to improved academic results.

One school I named a little earlier was Heritage Collegiate in Lethbridge. It is a beautiful school. The school itself is a beautiful school and I'm sure they wouldn't wish for anything different than what they have. It was built a little over 10 years ago. Today, Mr. Speaker, the parents, the students and the teachers are still fundraising to try to get a recreational area outside their school where their children can be active on and to be healthier, active learners in the school system. I would think in this century, anything less is shameful.

As stated, if we build new schools for the present only, we fail to adequately provide for future generations. We fail to raise the achievement bar to an academic level where we compete nationally and internationally.

In the last 10 years in education, we challenged ourselves and our results – we always look at our academic results. We seem to have adopted the curriculum from the Province of Alberta and BC as being core to what curriculum that we followed. Both those provinces have the highest incidents of daily, quality, physical education in the education system. Both of them are very active provinces.

I would say that it's not a coincidence that we're chasing the academic success of Alberta and BC, not a coincidence that they are both the highest incidents of active schools for children. It does make a difference. If you have healthy, active children, they make better learners. I would say and challenge those Members of which the four schools are being constructed, I don't know the answer, but I would think now would be the question: Does it include recreational areas where these children can become more active when we send them to school to spend their days? That's a fair question and it's a good investment in the youth of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I would suggest Clarenville is a regional centre for the District of Bonavista and it has been for some time. We held the Winter Games in Clarenville which enabled us, as a system and probably as a province, to build the Winter Games complex. It was our gymnasium. I would say to you that the students who went through Clarenville Middle School, if data were collected, because they had the benefit of having that large gym complex, were a healthy population. If you look at the academic results, the results would indicate that students were active, healthy learners. There's a high correlation, I would guess.

I would suggest that that model ought to be looked at in some other large centres across the province. Without naming them, we know that we're not just giving them enough but we give them more. Gander maybe ought not to only have two bays in their gymnasium. Clarenville, because the government had put it there in its day, has benefited from three full gymnasiums. I would say to you, we need to look at a standard, not do the same but to do more.

On a not-so-positive note, in the District of Terra Nova – and my colleague can speak to that sometime in the future – we decided to put a little over 700 primary school students into one building, and that was Riverside Elementary school. Keep in mind, we had the intermediate school with a huge complex that we had three and we were quite active in that setting. We put 700 primary children in Riverside in Clarenville into one regular gymnasium, where they have to split it in two to try and deliver a program for children in being active.

We don't need to be too astute to look and say where do those children go during their lunch hour. It's not the gymnasium, because you would never get in there. But if you looked at the recreation areas that are outside that school, you'd be equally shocked as well. We should never repeat Riverside Elementary again in the province. We should make sure that we adequately make those schools that the kids can be active.

When we look at the reasons for doing so, we need to invest, and we invest in our youth. We invest in them to make their lives better, richer,

healthier. One of the effects we can have then is that it's less demand on our health care.

Friday morning of last week, I was travelling on the highway and on VOXM I caught a piece of it, where this cardiologist was quite proud and pleased with the advances in heart disease in our province. But one thing he had mentioned was that in BC, if you were a male, your life expectancy is 82 years of age. He referenced that same adult male in Newfoundland it's 78. One can look and say that four years is not a big difference. Four years is a huge difference. We should be exceeding and aiming for higher than 82.

I'm going to leave education, because I would be amiss if I didn't speak to two senior situations that I would like to mention. One last thing on education. Why not try and do an analysis or a study on a four-day school week? Why not run from Monday to Thursday, leave one day off and let's see on a budgetary side of the school whether we save in heating, busing, staffing? The kids now are being transported as far away as an hour to schools. Maybe the four-day week we may have some savings in that, that in the District of Bonavista you may want to do a pilot. We would surely entertain the pilot of a four-day week after it is looked at.

Mr. Speaker, in my final minutes, I want to mention two seniors of whom I met in my door-to-door campaigning. One senior who just recently celebrated 60 years of volunteering in her community, 28 of those years were on council, 20 as mayor. She lost her husband at age 63. She clearly said that both of them paid into the government coffers for over 40 years, and she was proud to say never drew a penny. He was not the only Newfoundlander and Labradorian who contributed but never lived to receive a benefit.

This lady, now as a widower, talks of the plight of those in similar situations, many of whom gave lots of volunteer time but who find it very tough to remain in their own homes, and they struggle. They have the same expenses as they did when two of them were alive residing in that home, but in the unfortunate circumstance of losing one, she had found that she could not keep the house up, she couldn't renovate, she

struggled to be able to feed herself and heat the home without the renovations.

Ches Crosbie and I visited another lady in the District of Bonavista with a similar plight. Unfortunately, she's declared to be now legally blind, battling glaucoma. She has to travel from the District of Bonavista to St. John's for specialist treatment, and she does that every two months. She finds now that she's got to pay for her injection into her eye. She lost her husband in 2016, and she stated the same as the other story. Her husband was very proud to have contributed his whole life and never received a penny back.

She stated at that time she had \$1,800 in her RRSP. She was finding it tough. She withdrew the \$1,800 from her RRSP in one lump sum. She did it because she wanted to honour her deceased spouse by putting up a grave marker, a headstone. What she didn't realize is that she pulled that \$1,800 out of her RRSPs, only to find that she was docked the next year on her income, which made it more difficult for her to exist in the home and live by herself in that home.

Yesterday, the MHA for Stephenville - Port au Port asked the minister and the current government to look at the budget and to be open to the idea of making some changes for the betterment of the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador. I would suggest in short time, look at the medical transportation to help out this lady so that 100 per cent of her reimbursement for travel is honoured.

Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member's time has expired.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** I just want to take this opportunity as well to remind Members that they refer to Members by the name of their district or their position in the House. I just want to remind all Members of that.

The hon. the Member for Baie Verte - Springdale.

**MR. WARR:** Baie Verte - Green Bay, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Baie Verte - Green Bay, sorry.

**MR. WARR:** That's okay. It's the old District of Baie Verte – Springdale, but with the reallocation of the districts we became Baie Verte - Green Bay. I'm certainly happy to have the southern part of Green Bay back into the district.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** All of them are beautiful, of course.

**MR. WARR:** Absolutely.

I guess probably to start off, Mr. Speaker, is to congratulate all Members, those new Members, and on our side as well: congratulations, a job well done. Welcome to probably one of the highlights of your life, to be able to represent your district in the House of Assembly, as it was mine as well. I wish you nothing but the best.

To our new two Members, they're going to be a great addition to our caucus as well, Mr. Speaker. And to our friends from the NDP, congratulations.

Mr. Speaker, actually I had the opportunity – and I thank the hon. Member for Terra Nova. I made three pages of notes while you spoke, and a lot you spoke about I agree with. Certainly, he made some very good points. We had the opportunity during our MHA training day to sit and talk.

I knew he was the Education critic, or he was going to be the Education critic from the Official Opposition side, so we took the opportunity to sit and speak. Obviously, we had some connections that we shared. Number one, is our love of hockey. He was an old Bonavista Cabot, Mr. Speaker. We played in the same league years ago, and we shared our passion for swimming as well. So we got off to a great start. I committed to him, as I commit to the Education critic from the NDP as well, my full co-operation in the role that I have.

He actually mentioned an old name that I know very well, and that's Lorne Wheeler. Lorne

Wheeler was actually the principal of the high school that I attended. He left, I guess, probably in the mid-'70s, but we have a name that we're certainly familiar with here in this House of Assembly and that was the hon. Brian Peckford, who actually taught me in high school as well. So, some old names, and thank you for the refreshing update.

Mr. Speaker, I, too, want to salute our public servants during Public Service Week and thank them for all the good work they provide to the people of this province.

I'm going to start off, Mr. Speaker, talking about education, and if time permits, I'd like to run into a few things in my district as well. I'm certainly very pleased to stand here in this hon. House to outline the many important and progressive initiatives included in *Budget 2019* for our children, our youth and our young families across the province. I'm humbled to be given the opportunity to serve the people of Newfoundland and Labrador as Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

Since being sworn in on May 30, I've been learning about the department and the critical work done by the employees to support and enhance the K to 12 and early childhood education systems within the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. It is an incredible honour for me to lead and serve this department, and I thank our employees for their dedication and hard work.

Mr. Speaker, I've only had the opportunity to sit in the office – when you take in the training days we've had, I've only had the opportunity to sit in the office for maybe four or five days, but it's absolutely incredible the work that's being done and the dedication to the work, dedication to the students, dedication to families of children who attend our schools in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mr. Speaker, in July 2018, we released the Education Action Plan to guide actions to improve the K to 12 system. In less than one year, close to 40 per cent of the actions have been completed or are substantially underway. This certainly reflects the weight that we have placed on readying the province's youth for the

future. I think, Mr. Speaker, that's what it's all about.

*Budget 2019* allocates \$13 million, an increase of \$6 million from last year, to continue the implementation of the plan and to support better outcomes for students. Through the plan, we are implementing over 80 actions to ensure students have access to the supports they need, and 350 teacher resources are being hired over a three-year period.

By the way of an overview, Mr. Speaker, highlights of supports being provided this year, through a \$9 million allocation in *Budget 2019*, include additional reading specialists, teacher librarians, and teaching learning assistants in K to 12 education; learning resources for teachers to support reading in the primary and elementary grades for school libraries to support literacy development; and a mathematics bursary program to support teachers wishing to enhance their qualifications in mathematics.

But what does this actually mean in the classroom? Because that's where the rubber hits the road, Mr. Speaker. Here's what it means: 21 new reading specialists this year, which will increase to 104 over the next two years; a new position, teaching and learning assistant, supports teachers in primary and elementary schools; 54 teaching and learning assistants have already been hired, with a plan to hire another 146 over the next two years.

Teacher librarians and additional resources for school libraries are supporting literacy development. There are 13.5 additional teacher librarians this year, increasing to 39 over the next two years; 12 additional English and Second Language teachers have been added over three years as part of the larger part to support multicultural education; a mathematics bursary program has been implemented to support teachers wishing to enhance their qualifications in mathematics; and mathematics and reading program specialists are working in regions of the province to support teachers in primary and elementary schools.

Mr. Speaker, this is an exciting time in the K to 12 education system. Our staff are hearing it from teachers and administrators and they are embracing the initiatives that we are

implementing in the Education Action Plan. We are also providing support for teachers through a \$2 million investment in professional learning. And, as mentioned, we are continuing the math bursary program for K to six teachers through a \$40,000 investment. I am pleased to report that there has been a great interest throughout the province for school administrators, classroom teachers and specialists looking to enhance their knowledge and skills in mathematics.

As the former minister of the department noted earlier this spring, we are receiving positive feedback from teachers and specialists who have taken advantage of the bursary program. The comments that we have received are worth repeating. One mathematics program specialist wrote to say: I would strongly recommend the mathematics bursary program to a colleague, as it is a wonderful opportunity to enhance your teaching and learning proficiency in the area of mathematics. After completing my course, I definitely walked away with a broader, richer understanding of how best to teach mathematics in a K to six setting.

Mr. Speaker, *Budget 2019* also recognizes the important contribution of student assistants in the K to 12 school system and the budget for student assistant hours will be increased by \$300,000 over last year.

All children, Mr. Speaker, have the right to a quality education and an equitable opportunity to learn. Children enter school with their own individual experiences, abilities, family structures, interests and cultural backgrounds. Educators must consider these individual differences when making decisions regarding approaches to teaching and learning. This need was clearly identified in the Education Action Plan and we are moving forward and making progress in this important area through implementation of the recommendations. The increase in funding this year will help improve a school's ability to meet the needs and support the inclusion of all students with exceptionalities.

Mr. Speaker, another important focus of the Education Action Plan is social and emotional learning. Social and emotional skills are necessary for positive mental health by achieving and maintaining personal well-being

and positive relationships to succeed in the school environment and in all aspects of life.

Through education and early childhood development, as part of the responsive teaching and learning initiative currently being phased in across the province, *Budget 2019* provides an additional \$350,000 for social and emotional learning curriculum into the school system.

Mr. Speaker, I recently had the opportunity to attend Roots of Empathy annual baby celebration here in St. John's. This is an internationally recognized, school-based program and it reflects what we strive each day in our school communities through safe and caring school policies and initiatives. Studies show that children who take part in the program develop increased social and emotional skills. It reinforces what we all strive to instill in them: to respect each other's feelings.

Mr. Speaker, I had that opportunity, actually, last Thursday and what an incredible feeling, what an incredible place to be to have the opportunity to watch these children at such young ages engage with each other and through the support of their parents as well. Certainly, I think my first comment was you really know how to make a minister melt. My love of children – I've been a father, too, and certainly a proud grandpop of a young boy and young girl that my daughter actually adopted a couple of years ago. I'm actually lost for words to talk about children because they're so special to me, so I'll move on.

As mentioned, Mr. Speaker, through our Education Action Plan and the *Towards Recovery* action plan, and our investment in *Budget 2019*, we are ensuring resources are in place to support social and emotional learning of our students. Other investments in for the K to 12 school system include: \$975,300 to support assistive technology, multicultural education and provincial assessments; \$350,000 in learning resources for teachers to support reading in the primary and elementary grades; \$238,000 for youth apprenticeship co-operative education; \$200,000 in learning resources for school libraries to support literacy development.

Mr. Speaker, let me take a few minutes to speak more and specifically in more detail about the

implementation of the Education Action Plan. Implementation of the 82 recommendations are scheduled to occur in three phases: Short term, 31 recommendations have already been completed or were substantially underway within year one, which was the end of September 2018; medium term, there was an additional 40 recommendations which will be completed or substantially underway within years two to four, which is scheduled for September 2021; and our long-term goal, the remaining 11 recommendations, will be completed or substantially underway by year five, which would be the end of September 2022.

Several recommendations of the EAP that form a new student service model are also being phased in over a three-year period, with a particular emphasis on kindergarten to grade six and the necessary linkages with pre-school. Year one, which is 2018-2019, 40 schools, 39 within the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District and one with the Conseil scolaire francophone provincial de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador, located in every region of the province, carefully selected to provide a mix of urban and rural schools, small, medium and large-sized student populations, and schools with Indigenous student populations. Year two, '19 and '20, an additional 40 schools, similar selection process but accounting for feeder schools; and year three, all remaining schools.

The new student service model includes: a new tiered approach to meeting the needs of students in responsive teaching and learning policy; a new allocation of school-based reading specialists; first provincial-wide allocation to address reading issues; a new allocation of teaching and learning assistants to provide instructional support to primary-elementary students; and, an increase in the number of learning resource teachers to support school libraries and literacy development.

All 40 phase one schools receive several professional learning days through the 2018-2019 school year to assist implementation of new policies, new teaching and learning personnel and new learning resources. All administrations in the 40 phase two schools have received an initial two-day in-service to prepare the implementation of the new student service

model during the 2019-2020 school year. Presentations and feedback for phase one schools have been quite positive.

Mr. Speaker, before I speak to our child care initiatives and early childhood education, I would like to outline changes and progresses that we've made over the past year regarding school transportation in the K to 12 system. Transportation of students is a major focus, and we work with the school districts, operators and the industry to ensure it is as safe as possible. It is important to understand that we hear from parents all the time on various issues, and we have consistent dialogue with the district.

Last year, when there was a change to some bus routes across the province, parents brought their concerns and issues forward to the school district and to the department. I know my hon. colleagues, as I did, heard from parents in their districts. We have taken action to address concerns, and the current policy is comparable, and in most cases more favourable than other provinces. I actually tabled that report yesterday, for any Member that wants to have a copy, or they can – again, my door is open, and any time anybody here wants to engage in a discussion with regard to anything in education, certainly I welcome that.

Since last year, Mr. Speaker, we've gone from approximately 72 courtesy stops to 649 stops within the 1.6-kilometre zone, which is accommodating many additional students across the province. The current policy, with the addition of the courtesy stops, is working to what everybody is looking for. I see Members shaking their heads, and I respect that. We will continue to collaborate and work with districts, who in turn work with their local school community to address any pressure points that may arise.

Mr. Speaker, we recognize that family-friendly policies are needed to ensure our families can balance parenting with their daily work schedules. More affordable and accessible child care is important for families in the province as a whole. It helps build our communities, and it encourages parents to return to the workplace.

In a report released by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives that surveyed 28 major

Canadian cities, it was noted that uptake on the Operating Grant Program in St. John's has resulted in a drop in child care fees. St. John's is the only city of the 28 surveyed that has shown an overall drop in fees since the first report in 2014.

Building on the additional 1,000 affordable child care spaces created since last year, *Budget 2019* allocates approximately \$60 million for early childhood development, which includes \$7.4 million through the agreement with the federal government. These investments will provide \$17 million for child care service subsidy programs to reduce costs for individual families; provide \$11 million to continue the Operating Grant Program, which improves accessibility of child care for low- and middle-income families; and provide an income enhancement to qualified early childhood educators working in regulated child care services to help improve the quality of child care services.

The threshold for a full subsidy has been adjusted to \$32,000 net family income and will be increased to \$35,000 in the near future – actually, July 1. A partial subsidy is also available to many other families with higher than \$32,000 net family income.

Mr. Speaker, by the looks of things, I'm not going to get an opportunity to finish all this, so I'll just take an opportunity to sort of clue up. Again, Mr. Speaker, I certainly have enjoyed my time here in the House of Assembly. It's been a great opportunity and a great feeling representing the District of Baie Verte - Green Bay, a district that I grew up in. I know the issues that I face everyday.

My hon. colleague talked about her encounter with moose. Well, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to join the Member for Conception Bay East - Bell Island and the Premier in Baie Verte last weekend for the mining conference, and I know it only too well, as I struck a moose on the way up over the Baie Verte Peninsula. So if I can pass along a comment to my hon. colleague for Transportation and Works, we have to get those roads cleared.

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity. I'll have another opportunity.



Thank you very much.

**MR. SPEAKER (Trimper):** Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for the District of Topsail - Paradise.

**MR. P. DINN:** Thank you, Minister.

And I was going to say the beautiful District of Topsail - Paradise, but I believe our Member for Cape St. Francis has a monopoly on that word.

I'm pleased to rise and speak for the magnificent and beautiful District of Topsail - Paradise, and I want to take an opportunity – because, of course, I'm no longer a newbie here, which is a good thing I guess, but I'm going to intertwine some of my maiden speech, which I never had an opportunity to do, into this.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Terrible.

**MR. P. DINN:** It is terrible. It's ridiculous.

I first want to thank my family for their unwavering support in helping me to get here. I personally thank the residents of Topsail - Paradise for putting their confidence in me and giving me the opportunity to be their voice in the House of Assembly. It's a responsibility that I take very serious, and I will certainly advocate on their behalf to the best of my ability. I think I've said it before, I don't believe politics was on my bucket list, but somehow led me down this way and here I am.

I was born in St. John's. I wasn't born in Paradise, but I spent most of my life in Paradise, raised by two wonderful parents. I had three brothers, three sisters. My mother gave up her job to raise us, and my father worked on the railway. So a great accomplishment for my parents to be able to raise a family of seven on one income and to be successful. Because I think everyone of us have achieved a university degree, or multiple degrees, and that's more of a reflection on our parents than on us ourselves.

We were obviously raised to do the best we can, to be empathetic, to listen to people, to be involved. I'm certainly glad to be here, and I would say the same for my bigger brother who also occupies a seat here as well.

I spent some time after university working with the provincial government, federal government at a point in time, and gained a lot of experience, which I hope to bring and have brought to this House of Assembly. I think the people of Topsail - Paradise realize my commitment there and have put their faith in me.

Talking about Topsail - Paradise, a wonderful, wonderful district. It's one of the younger and fastest growing areas of the province. We've seen lots of growth in the area in terms of the new schools, the walking trails, the new sports complexes, the shopping centres, and we can go on and on. There are so many positive changes for the young families who take up residence in our community.

Part of my participation in the community, and what led me to this, was participating and volunteering. Volunteering within the community is something I take very serious. I've been involved in quite a few activities. I think most of the Members in this House have, at some point in time, volunteered or continue to volunteer. I believe that's giving to the community without expecting anything back. I think our communities would not be running as they are unless we had the work of volunteers.

I have a quote here – because we all consider ourselves politicians. I like to refer to myself as an elected official. Try and find a positive quote with the word “politician” in it, I challenge you. It's not there. You cannot find it. So I consider myself an elected official.

When it comes to volunteering within your community, I found this quote. It says: “Volunteering is the ultimate exercise in democracy. You vote in elections one a year, but when you volunteer, you vote every day about the kind of community you want to live in.” That's so true. I encourage everyone, if they haven't volunteered, to do so.

Mr. Speaker, part of my volunteering involved working with youth groups. In my mind, we talk

about the resources of our province. In our budget, we talk about our natural resources. We talk about forestry. We talk about hydro. We talk about all these resources we have, but I believe our most valuable resource are our youth. Our youth are our future. I think we have to do much more in terms of helping our youth. That could be anything from child care to, as my colleague mentioned, increasing opportunities for being active.

Again, I just go back to another quote, which of course is another unknown author: "If you want to touch the past, touch a rock. If you want to touch the present, touch a flower. If we want to touch the future, touch a life." That quote is so applicable to what I think, as an elected official, we should be doing because it's the lives of our population, our residents in Newfoundland and Labrador that have to be primary in what we do.

Now, I'll take my comments more relevant to the budget. I think all of us, as elected officials, we're elected by the people, for the people and I certainly intend to represent the people of Topsail - Paradise.

Going door to door, we had the opportunity now and a prime opportunity for us to hear exactly what our constituents are saying, what our constituents want. Mr. Speaker, during my campaign on a daily basis, like all Members of this House, we had the opportunity to have conversations on the doorsteps, conversations in the coffee shops, conversations wherever, on what our residents want for our province and want for our districts, and I just want to touch on some of these.

Taxation – taxation was a huge one. Residents expressed their dismay in the level of taxation we're facing. They pointed to the examples of the 300-plus taxes placed on us. They talked about the taxes on auto insurance and insurance. I got to say I had a couple of conversations with residents who were extremely, extremely upset over the levy. One in my district and one I believe in the Minister of Finance's district – no reflection on the minister, it just happened to be the individual was in that district but two of them were –

**MR. OSBORNE:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. P. DINN:** I will – it may have been your brother.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. P. DINN:** But they were really, really upset with the levy to the point that they were hanging up the phones when people were calling during the election. You know what, from an economic point of view, when you're taxing people, you're taking money out of their pockets and you're decreasing their disposable income, income that would be spent in the communities and on businesses.

Energy rates – energy rates is not new to any of us. When talking about Muskrat Falls and the mitigation, that is a prime concern for many of the residents. We've come out with plans – when I say we, we have come, one on this side and one on the government side in terms of ways to mitigate. I don't think – people have a bit of lacking in faith in how these plans are going to roll out.

One certainly was the \$200 million that the government have expressed that would come from the federal government. That's certainly a big question mark for residents out there. I think they are looking for a plan that is clear, that's obtainable, that is practical and that people can see some relief in terms of energy rates. So that is a huge one as well.

As I mentioned earlier, talking about youth and youth being the most important resource in my mind when it comes to the economy, and comes to our province, child care and daycare. Child care and daycare are really prime areas where people want to see some motion made to ensure that it's affordable, that daycare and child care are affordable.

It was interesting. It was a topic of discussion on one of the open-line shows this morning. It's amazing, some of the comments you hear on it. But from an economic – and I hate to talk economics because a former co-worker of mine is sitting as Leader of the Third Party here, we worked together and I may know 10 per cent of the economics that she knows, but I'll take this 10 per cent and I'll throw it out there. When

you're talking about child care and affordability, I sat in on a group discussion by the group advocating for child care there a couple of months back and the effect on the economy of child care is really huge.

We talk about population decline, we talk about losing our families, they are leaving, we talk about families leaving to follow their grandchildren and follow their children. Affordable child care allows that second parent to work, or a parent to work. Most times, it's the mother who sacrifices her career to stay home with her child. Now, I use the word sacrifice, I mean everyone would love to stay home with their children. But you give up a career to stay home because you can't afford the child care, or you say I'm working to pay for child care. So the better of the deal is well, if I'm working to pay for child care, I might as well be home spending time with my child.

But people out there, if they can afford child care and it's affordable to people, people actually will have more kids. It's been proven. Believe it or not, fertility rates go up when you have more affordable child care, and you have more people in the workforce working, and you have more people in the workforce generating revenue and dollars and taxes.

So, we really need to do something about child care. I think there are a lot of different programs different provinces have used. We should be looking at that. When we look at budget items, we always look at the cost of that item. And we should be, we should be looking at that.

When we look at budget items, we always look at the cost of that item, and we should be. We should be looking at the cost of the item, but we also need to look at the cost of not doing something. We have to look at the cost of not doing something proactive. I think child care is one of those areas we really need to look at, be proactive down the road and what it does for us.

Seniors; I think we all, in every part of this province, have seniors, and we deal with issues around seniors. We're the fastest, oldest, aging population in the country. So, it shouldn't hit us as any surprise that we're going to have issues there, and it's going to continue to snowball until we start to address seniors' issues.

In Topsail - Paradise, we have a great seniors community. We have a couple of seniors' homes that do wonderful work in looking after people's parents and grandparents.

We've heard one of the Members for Mount Pearl speak about Lillian's Law as an option, and I say an option, but there are other ways that we should be looking at home care and institutional care for our seniors.

Transportation is a big issue as well. You have seniors with mobility issues. Seniors who are trying to get to doctors appointments. Seniors who are just trying to get out to the mall. We need to come up with some transportation systems that will accommodate our seniors.

It's not just seniors, you also talk about accessibility. Many seniors have problems with mobility, but also we have a population out there – and I would say to you, it's a hidden population for many of us.

In Topsail - Paradise, I've met with groups who have visual disabilities of all ages, and it was amazing when they told me the number of individuals within the area of Topsail - Paradise alone that suffer from visual disabilities. These are individuals who need transportation. So we need to look at accessible transportation options for our seniors and for those who have accessibility issues.

I also want to talk about – and this is where the Leader of the Third Party may start poking me and saying I'm wrong on some points. My background, I have a degree in business and education. I worked much of my career with the now Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour dealing with labour market, skills development and a number of issues over there.

We have some great workers here in the province, and on Public Service Week it's an opportunity for us to say congratulations, job well done. I can't say enough about the staff of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour, but also the staff of Finance. They produce these documents that help us all make decisions. We've had two Members speak on that and use the documents and look at them. It's wonderful information, and for me a little bit of knowledge becomes dangerous.

I think if we're going forward and we're looking at information that we need to be useful to make decisions, and I think we have a set up here – we have a minority government here. Will there be challenges? Certainly. But are there opportunities? Obviously, there are. I think we have an opportunity here to – my job is to hold you accountable. Some of it may sound critical but it's to hold you accountable.

I go back to a discussion we had previous to the first budget, and the Minister of Finance, and I believe the Premier, had mentioned this data previously and they've mentioned it again. As an indicator, they talk about the 11 months now of consecutive growth and employment. Now, I'm going to say that's not accurate, but I'm saying it's not accurate because I don't really know what pieces of information are being used to come up with that. Because you –

**MR. OSBORNE:** Stats Canada.

**MR. P. DINN:** Stats Canada.

So if I do that, if I go to Stats Canada – thank you for that. If I go to Stats Canada, and I talked about this earlier, the labour market survey puts out the data on employment by Stats Canada, right.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Adjusted.

**MR. P. DINN:** Adjusted, seasonally adjusted, and unadjusted. They put out both.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** A little order please, just a little.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. SPEAKER:** Just a little order, please.

Yes, Sir.

**MR. P. DINN:** No, but this is my point. So the minister and the Premier have in the past used month over month, and previously they were saying year over year, okay? I can understand where you might say that.

Year over year, you're comparing August 2018 to August this year. Month over month you're comparing previous months. So when I look at that data month over month, it's been up and down and everywhere. In fact, it's been down in May. The labour force survey that came out last week, employment is down. If you go year over year, going back the 11 months, the first six, full-time employment was down, and it's been up.

I'm not saying it's incorrect information, but what I'm getting at, if we're going to make decisions on the labour market – and that's one benchmark, one benchmark. We know, and the expat survey that we got coming out from Goss Gilroy, that's going to tell us that what people want most is full-time permanent work.

I'm not at all saying part-time work is useless. We have a lot of people who want part-time work, but when we look at this data we will see that what's driving employment more – more than not – is part-time employment; part-time employment over the 11 months, part-time employment. What we need to do is create more jobs. It sounds simple. I wish there was a simple solution. We really need to create more full-time permanent, meaningful employment, okay. That's where we need to go.

Just to the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills, when we talk about immigration and increasing immigration to the province – I think he used the comment or the word in the past: we're setting achievable targets. That's wonderful. I like achievable targets. I tell my kids when they come home and say: Dad, I only need 25 per cent on the final to pass. I say, well, let's do better than that.

In the Mackenzie report I noted that we need to be more ambitious. It says it in the Mackenzie report, we need to be more ambitious in our targets. Nothing against achievable targets. Your success rate at the end of the day looks better when you do achievable targets, but let's not be afraid of failure when we set ambitious targets. We need to do better on immigration. We need to do better on creating jobs.

So let's, as a minority government and collectively in this House of Assembly, let's push for more ambitious targets because this

province could be a lot better than where we are. We love this province and we could be doing so much more.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would suggest now, given the hour, that we recess until 2 p.m.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Consistent with Standing Order 9(1)(b) this House is in recess until 2 o'clock this afternoon.

### Recess

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

**MR. SPEAKER (Trimper)** Admit strangers, please.

Order, please!

I'd like to welcome my colleagues back to this House of Assembly for the afternoon. I'd also like to introduce to the House of Assembly another one of our new Pages. With me is Lauren Borgeonkar. She is from St. John's and she is studying Business at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador.

A very big welcome to you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Joining us for a Ministerial Statement this afternoon from the Newfoundland and Labrador and Labrador Association for Community Living, we have Fraser Piccott, Development Coordinator.

From Roncalli Elementary, we have the Principal, Alun Young; teachers Shannon McCarthy, Lisa Tucker; Administrator Deb Smith; Guidance Counsellor David Lynch; and students Lucas Hodder, Ethan Coady and Emma Coady.

A big welcome to all of you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

### Statements by Members

**MR. SPEAKER:** For Members' statement today we will hear from Windsor Lake, St. John's Centre, Topsail - Paradise, Placentia West - Bellevue and Exploits.

The hon. the Member for Windsor Lake.

**MR. CROSBIE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise to recognize the upcoming 35th anniversary this July of a vital part of my district: the MacMorran Community Centre.

For more than a century, MacMorran has been there for the neighbourhoods of Brophy Place and McGrath Crescent, for families, for young and old. I misspoke myself, I should have said more than a third of a century; it's not quite that old. Established thanks to the efforts of the Pius X Parish, the centre began with just a clothing exchange and a food bank but expanded today to encompass a range of key services.

None of this would be possible, of course, without the intense efforts of its staff and its many, many volunteers. While no one act of charity should be elevated above another, I was asked to thank the efforts in particular of Brother Jim McSheffrey who gave the last decade of his life into moving the programs and profile of the centre to where it stands today.

Mr. Speaker, it was Coretta Scott King who once wrote: "The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members." MacMorran community stands not only as a beacon of compassionate action in my district, but in our province.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

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

**MR. J. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This past weekend I had the opportunity to accompany a group of English as a Second Language students from Holy Heart on an overnight trip to the Brother Brennan Centre. Their teacher, Mr. Greg Simmons, organized this trip to practise their newly learned fly-fishing skills.

Yesterday, I had the privilege to speak to grade four students of Hazelwood Elementary about elections, what it means to be a Member of the House of Assembly, and how we work together to make the best decisions on their behalf. Thank you to teacher Marnie Sinnott for the invitation.

Ms. Sinnott and many teachers across our province used the recent provincial election as an opportunity to teach students about elections and the different forms of government.

That's what teachers do: improvise, adapt and seize opportunities to make learning relevant and fun for their students. They spend their own money, arrange special trips and give of their own time to bring learning alive. At the heart of teaching, at its very core, is the student. Teaching is a career with the potential to change students' lives.

As the school year draws to a close, I take this opportunity to thank the teachers of Newfoundland and Labrador for all they do on behalf of our students.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for the District of Topsail - Paradise.

**MR. P. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Today it is an honour for me to stand and congratulate Mr. Charles Moores, a life-long member of the Royal Canadian Legion, who turned 102 on June 9. Mr. Moores was born in 1917 at Carbonear, Newfoundland, and currently resides at Meadow Creek Retirement Centre in my District of Topsail - Paradise.

Mr. Moores, at the age of 23, joined the Merchant Navy and served until the end of the Second World War. While at war, Mr. Moores tells of a time that they encountered enemy action and his boat was torpedoed and sank. With just a life jacket on and unable to swim, he jumped into the ocean and had to hold on to a raft for approximately three hours before being rescued by one of their corvettes.

When the war ended, he returned to Carbonear and, in 1949, married Elizabeth Deering. Together, they moved to St. John's and raised a family of three children. He worked at Steers Limited for approximately 25 years before becoming self-employed, operating his own driving school.

Mr. Moores lived at his own home in Paradise before entering Meadow Creek three years ago and takes part in all activities, and especially enjoys it when they have music and a dance.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members to congratulate Mr. Moores on his 102nd birthday.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

**MR. DWYER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's my honour to represent the people of Placentia West - Bellevue. It is a great honour to inform you of a celebration I attended this past weekend. An organization in my district celebrates their 40th year of incorporation.

Forty years ago, they had a vision. They decided to bring communities together and create something for the future. This organization has been a key player in the development of tourism and other services in their communities.

They were, and remain to be, instrumental in the establishment and maintaining of Placentia West Medical Clinic, located just south of Boat Harbour intersection. This organization also operates the Tea Rose restaurant and heritage

grounds, a great place to stop on your travels while travelling on Route 10, the Heritage Run.

I would like to congratulate the Placentia West Development Association on their ruby anniversary; forty years and still going strong – congratulations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for the District of Exploits.

**MR. FORSEY:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On March 5, I had the honour of emceeding the Bishop's Falls Lions Club speak out, a contest that provides youth with the opportunity to build skills and have a public voice in issues of concern to them.

One contestant, 18-year-old Victoria Pretty, voiced her concern on the importance of voting. She placed first in local, regional and district levels. She then went to participate in the Multiple District N speak outs in Nova Scotia last month. She often takes advantage of social media in this day and age by using her platform to speak up and educate others in politics, issues in her community, and other concerns such as environmental stewardship and racial injustice.

Victoria is a level III student, planning to major in journalism at the University of King's in Halifax this fall.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all Members of this House to join me in congratulating Victoria and all our province's youth on their accomplishments.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Statements by Ministers.

#### Statements by Ministers

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

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

I rise today in this hon. House to join with Filipino Newfoundlanders and Labradorians in acknowledging Philippines Independence Day.

Our province is home to a growing community of people with strong personal and family ties to the Philippines. Many have been here for their entire lives; others have settled here more recently. From Lab West to my very own District of Virginia Waters - Pleasantville, Filipino Newfoundlanders and Labradorians are playing an active role in our communities and making heartfelt contributions to our social, cultural and economic growth.

As minister, I take this opportunity to say thank you to this thriving community for choosing to invest their time and talents in Newfoundland and Labrador. By making your home right here, you are helping to build a brighter future for all of us.

Mr. Speaker, I invite all Members of this hon. House to join me in congratulating the Philippines on its Independence Day.

Mabuhay.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

**MR. P. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Member opposite for an advance copy of his statement. Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House join all Members in congratulating the Philippines on its Independence Day, commemorating their independence from Spain on June 12, 1898. Filipino Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have made tremendous contributions to our communities here in the province. They are our friends, our neighbours, co-workers and classmates.

Mr. Speaker, we are fortunate that so many people from all over the world have settled here in our province. The minister acknowledged the contributions made to our social, cultural and

economic growth, and I hope we continue to improve our immigration rates.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, let me again offer congratulations from all my colleagues on this side of the House on Philippines Independence Day.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Leader of the Third Party.

**MS. COFFIN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, thank the minister for an advance copy of the statement. I congratulate the Filipino community on Philippines Independence Day and thank them for the great contributions to our province.

Filipinos have come in greater numbers in recent years for schooling or temporary work, and they have decided to stay. They are making their homes here, raising families, contributing to our economy and our communities. Together, we will benefit for many years to come from Filipinos sharing their culture and embracing ours.

Congratulations to Filipinos everywhere, and welcome and thank you to those who have chosen to call Newfoundland and Labrador their home.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. WARR:** Mr. Speaker, I rise in this hon. House today to congratulate Roncalli

Elementary in St. John's, on receiving this year's Inclusive Education Award.

Students come to our schools with various experiences, abilities, family situations, interests, learning styles and cultural backgrounds. Each student needs to feel that they belong, are valued and can contribute. Inclusive education considers the diversity of every learner.

Mr. Speaker, the Inclusive Education Award, presented by the Newfoundland and Labrador Association for Community Living, is awarded annually to a K to 12 school that has shown an exceptional spirit in creating a school that is welcoming and inclusive for students with an intellectual disability.

Roncalli Elementary was presented this award for their dedicated and committed effort to ensuring that every student is a valued and important member of the school community, and that all students receive a high quality education in a caring and inclusive environment.

Roncalli Elementary has worked very hard to ensure that all students feel welcome, safe and accepted. I invite my colleagues in this House to join me in congratulating Roncalli Elementary for their outstanding achievements.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Bonavista.

**MR. PARDY:** Mr. Speaker, a sincere thank you to the minister for an advance copy of his statement, and a big welcome to the Roncalli family in our gallery today.

I join with the minister to congratulate the staff and students of Roncalli Elementary in St. John's on receiving this year's Inclusive Education Award. As a former administrator, I have a deep appreciation for the importance of inclusivity in schools and our communities.

Roncalli Elementary has become a sterling example of what it means to embrace inclusivity



in our schools. Diversity is our strength, and every child needs to feel valued and a sense that they belong.

I applaud the efforts of Roncalli Elementary students and staff and look forward to the lessons that we can all learn from their lead.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. J. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, thank the minister for an advance copy of his statement. And I, too, extend congratulations to Roncalli Elementary for winning this year's award. As former president of the NLTA, I had the opportunity to visit that school and I know it's well deserved.

The teachers of Roncalli are typical of so many teachers in this province, and they make the extra effort to make sure that all students are included in the educational process. Teachers believe that education is important to all students. It means providing opportunities to succeed, prosper and become full and contributing members of society.

Again, I extend, in this case, this recognition to Roncalli for their well-deserved award.

Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Further statements by ministers?

The hon. the Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development.

**MS. DEMPSTER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to recognize June as Seniors Month. We have seniors to thank for building our

communities and creating this place we call home.

Mr. Speaker, we value our strong collaborations with community partners that support seniors throughout the province. I extend my sincere appreciation to the Provincial Advisory Council on Aging and Seniors, SeniorsNL, the Newfoundland and Labrador 50+ Federation and the Seniors Coalition, as well as the many 50-plus clubs and other local seniors' organizations.

As our population continues to age, we are creating new ways to ensure that older adults continue to be full and active participants in their communities. We have allocated funding in *Budget 2019* for a new social inclusion initiative to help seniors in 50-plus clubs participate in activities supporting healthy aging, and promoting mental health and well-being.

This new program is in addition to the many steps we've already taken to support our province's seniors to age in place, including the Age-Friendly Communities Program, the Community Transportation Program, and the Seniors Benefit and Income Supplement.

More than 80 per cent of the clients served by the Newfoundland and Labrador Housing Corporation are seniors. And on that note, Mr. Speaker, recently we signed a \$270-million housing agreement with the federal government, and seniors will be one of the priority areas of this historic agreement. In '19-'20, the Home Energy Savings Program will provide \$4.1 million. This program funds energy efficiency upgrades, helping to lower heating costs for many seniors.

We are proud to have established an Office of the Seniors' Advocate – the third of its kind in Canada. The Advocate is a strong, independent voice for seniors in our province and is currently meeting with seniors across Newfoundland and Labrador to learn from them.

This month, I encourage everyone to celebrate seniors for the tremendous contributions they have made and continue to make to our communities.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Placentia West - Bellevue.

**MR. DWYER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to thank the hon. Member for an advance copy of her statement. Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House join the minister in recognizing June as Seniors' Month. Seniors in Newfoundland and Labrador have made a tremendous contribution to our society that we would all like to celebrate and, indeed, be thankful for.

I join the minister in thanking and congratulating the many senior organizations and groups that are found around the province. These provide a network of support, guidance and assistance. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, too many of our seniors continue to struggle with the high cost of living, including housing, food, taxes and fees. The government needs to do more to address this very serious situation facing our society.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the first report of the Seniors' Advocate, who I am sure will provide valuable insights into addressing these issues.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

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

**MR. J. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the minister for an advance copy of her statement. I'm happy to join with the minister in celebrating our seniors. Many cultures see seniors as elders who hold wisdom from which we and those younger can learn, and we must learn to do the same.

The programs listed by the minister are indeed impressive, but I think there's more that we can do. We must protect our seniors from rising electricity rates. We must ensure that not only do

seniors have the ability to age in place, but that long-term care facilities have appropriate levels of care. We must ensure that low-income seniors have proper access to dental care and over-the-counter prescriptions. I think that's how we start showing our true appreciation for these elders in our community.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

Further statements by ministers?

Oral Questions.

### Oral Questions

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

**MR. CROSBIE:** Mr. Speaker, the Trudeau bill, C-69, known as the no more pipelines bill, and in this province as the no more offshore bill, the Premier delivered a letter dated May 30, 2019, to the Senate in which he pointed to the joint management regime in place for the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador offshore and requested that the regulatory powers of C-NLOPB be preserved.

Would the Premier report to the House the response of the Senate of Canada to his request?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, before I address the question today, there's one thing I would like all Members of this House to know, that the Leader of the Opposition, this is his birthday today and I would like to wish him a happy birthday. That's, of course, if Facebook is right.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**PREMIER BALL:** And for his birthday, Members on this side of the House will be giving a gift, and that will be the elimination of the levy as of December 31, 2019. That's, of course, if we get our budget through.

Now, Mr. Speaker, to the question at hand about Bill C-69. I think everyone in this province would know that we have gone through great lengths in making sure that the position of Newfoundland and Labrador is well established. We've called on amendments to those within the Senate.

The Minister of Natural Resources and I made a joint submission to the Senate Committee, and we've been in touch with Members of Parliament. Mr. Speaker, we want to protect the Atlantic Accord. We understand the role of joint management, Mr. Speaker, and we will do everything we can to protect the Atlantic Accord in this province.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. CROSBIE:** Thank you to the Premier for his mention of regards, but I've been insisting all day that the rumour of my birthday has been a rumour circulated by the Liberals only.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. CROSBIE:** To return to topic, the Senate sent C-69 back to the House of Commons with many amendments, but not with the amendment requested by the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Premier: What does he plan to do now to protect the principles of the Atlantic Accord.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Like many vicious rumours, some of them have been around over 60 years; nevertheless, those respecting the principles of the Atlantic Accord – the Member is right, there are some-181 amendments that came out of the Senate and went into the House of Commons, Mr. Speaker. That debate is occurring within the legislature of Canada right now.

We take exception, Mr. Speaker, to some of things that those changes – it is our job, and I think collectively the job of all of us on this

floor, to protect the arrangement that we have with the Atlantic Accord, that is, of course, joint management.

I will tell you, however – the Member opposite spoke of pipelines. Let's not forget what we have currently in place, CEAA 2012, that when you look at Canada, never delivered one pipeline. I will tell you, CEAA 2012 has done this province no favours. It's our intention, we will work hard to make sure we get the necessary changes.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. CROSBIE:** On Monday, six premiers delivered a letter to Prime Minister Trudeau saying the bill, that's C-69, makes natural resource investment impossible and threatens national unity.

Was our Premier of this province approached to sign? And, if so, why did he refuse?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We were on a call last week with the premiers, all premiers in Canada, and this issue of course came up as well. As well, I do have a copy of the letter. I'm sure the Leader of the Opposition would have that.

Mr. Speaker, I've spoken out quite a bit on Bill C-69, but also quite a bit with my colleagues across this country on CEAA 2012. As I said, that was the Harper answer to improvement in natural resource development within our province and we have not seen any at all, I would say. As a matter of fact, that set this province back. In 2012 there wasn't much noise, I will say, from the PC administration of the day. I will say that, as we all know, there was no pipelines built in Canada under CEAA 2012.

So, there's no doubt, we need to be competitive, Mr. Speaker. We need to be very competitive. It is one of the reasons why *Advance 2030* was put in place. We have seen investment come to Newfoundland and Labrador ....

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. CROSBIE:** I thank the Premier for his answer, but it's not helping us to understand why he refused to sign the letter along with the other six premiers.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Mr. Speaker, we have a letter that's gone from Newfoundland and Labrador to the Minister of Environment in Canada, who is basically marshalling this bill. Simply because someone like Jason Kenney and Scott Moe – these are people that I talk to on a regular basis. Their issues can be somewhat different than ours. What we want in our province – as a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that's important for us is to make sure that exploratory wells are exempt.

Mr. Speaker, Jason Kenney hasn't got a worry about exploratory wells because he don't have an offshore, we have an offshore. We want to protect our offshore. We want to continue to see investment come to Newfoundland and Labrador, Mr. Speaker, and we will continually press for changes to the regime to make sure that this province is a competitive place to invest.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**MR. CROSBIE:** It seems clear, Mr. Speaker, that our Premier does not agree with the other premiers that issues of national unity are now engaged by C-69.

Offshore development accounts for around 20 per cent of our provincial GDP, nearly 15 per cent of government revenue and many well paying jobs.

Why is the Premier defending the anti-resource development policies of Prime Minister Trudeau

which are driving away investment in our offshore?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear here. We are not defending Bill C-69. We are not defending CEAA 2012. That piece of legislation for Newfoundland and Labrador was regressive. As a matter of fact, as I said earlier, it was regressive for all of Canada. This is what we, and all the other premiers, want to see changed. I have asked people like Jason Kenney, Scott Moe and others in Saskatchewan: Do they want to go back to CEAA 2012? They all agreed, no, we can't go back there; it needs to be replaced.

We have tremendous on-tap resources in Newfoundland and Labrador and we are in constant contact. I met with the minister this morning on this very issue. I will tell you, we are engaged and pressing to make this province more competitive.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Leader of the Official Opposition.

**MR. CROSBIE:** Let's circle back to the Budget Speech, which looked forward to – and I quote – “shorter times from discovery to production” by 2030.

How does the government expect to achieve shorter times from discovery to production without joining other premiers to oppose the Trudeau no-more-offshore bill, C-69?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, I would say that if we want to play politics in all of this, I would argue that Mr. Harper, his colleague, did very little when it comes to CEAA 2012.

I think it's important that we look at the facts of CEAA 2012. Then what we saw was a downgrade, at that particular point in time, in our Atlantic Accord. When we look at offshore

assessments, regional assessments, these are things that are very important to be incorporated into a new impact assessment agency that we see in our offshore.

*Advance 2030*, as we just outlined, was an agreement, an action plan that we put in place with industry to make sure that we do shorten the timeline between exploration and significant discovery into production for Newfoundland and Labrador.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

**MR. WAKEHAM:** Mr. Speaker, this Liberal government is promising to return the province to surplus in fiscal 2022-23, but in order to do this the minister has said, in his own fiscal forecast, that revenue will need to increase by \$439 million by 2022-23.

I ask the minister: Where will this revenue come from?

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

**MR. OSBORNE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's in large part due to natural resources. If the Member looks a little bit deeper into our books, oil production, for example, this year is up about 12 per cent, just as an example. We've got mining developments – several mining developments were announced last year, or in the last 12 months. We anticipate revenue from mining developments as they come on stream as well.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

**MR. WAKEHAM:** Mr. Speaker, this budget has \$8.4 billion worth of spending.

Again, in your own fiscal forecast, the Minister of Finance indicates the need to reduce spending to \$7.8 billion by 2022-23.

I ask the minister: How is he going to decrease spending by \$617 million by 2022-23?

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

**MR. OSBORNE:** Well, there are two answers to that question, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I'd ask him to tap on the shoulder of the guy sat next to him who put a list of eight demands forward which would cost hundreds of millions of dollars over the next three years. That's certainly not a way to reduce spending, without having a balanced approach in order to implement the things we'd also like to see. But real leadership means that you need to have a balanced approach.

How we look at this, in part, is by shared services, as an example. Shared services will save government tens of millions of dollars. We've looked at reducing the size of government's vehicle fleet. We've already had great success reducing the size of leased space that government has. We've had great success, Mr. Speaker. We've done zero-based budgeting. We have efficiencies that we've put in place, and some of the savings from those are still to be found.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

**MR. WAKEHAM:** For the record, Mr. Speaker, we didn't say we wanted to increase the expenditure for this fiscal year, we asked that the budget be reintroduced and we would work with them to live within that budget.

This Liberal government promised the people of the province that they would get their financial house in order, but they have failed to get spending under control.

So I ask the minister: You now have over a billion-dollar problem. Based on your track

record of increasing expenditures, do you have an actual plan to return to surplus?

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

**MR. OSBORNE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'll start off by saying that we've held spending steady, despite the consumer price index, despite some of the many very positive initiatives that we've put forward as a government in health care, in infrastructure projects, whether it's schools or hospitals or roads that were badly in need of repair.

So we've held spending relatively steady, despite an aging population and health care and drug costs becoming more expensive. What will not hold spending steady are the eight initiatives where they ask for spending but provide absolutely no indication as to where the money will come from.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

**MR. WAKEHAM:** In *Budget 2016* the Liberal government asked the people of this province to reach into their pockets and contribute more. In exchange, the Liberals promised that they would cut expenditures. And I quote, budget speech 2016: "In addition to the public engagement efforts, to further address the deficit, all government departments, agencies, boards and commissions were asked to identify potential options for savings and present options to reduce expenditures by thirty per cent over three years."

I ask the Finance Minister: Has this been done?

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

**MR. OSBORNE:** Mr. Speaker, we have found considerable savings within government departments through the Government Renewal Initiative and through a flatter, leaner government. We've outlined, through zero-based budgeting, savings within government. In fact, Mr. Speaker, some of those savings were put into very important initiatives that the people

of the province wanted to see over the past three years.

I've also indicated, Mr. Speaker, that we're now focusing on some of our agencies, boards and commissions, in the same way we found within government departments, some additional savings in those areas. It accounts for about 60 per cent of government's total spend.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

**MR. WAKEHAM:** Mr. Speaker, numbers don't lie. Three years ago, the Liberal government spent \$8.3 billion in 2016-17. This year, they are planning to spend \$8.4 billion. So, after three years, instead of a reduction of 30 per cent, we actually have a projected increase in expenditures.

Where is the reduction that was promised?

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

**MR. OSBORNE:** Mr. Speaker, I tell you one of the places we're not going to find a reduction is an initiative that he wanted to do and remove the nurse from Black Tickle. If we want to play politics, Mr. Speaker, politics can go both ways. If we want to be conciliatory and look to cooperate, that goes both ways as well.

I'd ask the Member opposite to identify the hundreds of millions of dollars in spending that they've asked us to put in place, where that money is coming from.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Stephenville - Port au Port.

**MR. WAKEHAM:** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance knows full well that regional health authorities do not make final decisions on budget reductions when it comes to health care.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Oh, oh!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. WAKEHAM:** They are approved by the government of the day and the departments of the day.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Is there a question?

The hon. the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board.

**MR. OSBORNE:** Mr. Speaker, the recommendations come from the regional health authorities and I believe it was his recommendation to remove the nurse.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

**MS. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Mr. Speaker, last year in Estimates, the Minister of Justice said he was concentrating on getting the Family Violence Intervention Court open in Central in 2018. However, last night he told the Estimate's Committee that he's still evaluating the location.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: When was your latest discussion with the Chief Justice regarding this matter?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

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

I appreciate the question from my colleague across the way. The Family Violence Intervention Court is something that we've been working quite hard on over the last number of years. There's one up and running in St. John's, we've established one on the West Coast and we would still like to have one in Labrador and one in Central.

When I came in in 2015, the decision that was in place by the department at that time was to put it in Clarenville; however, I didn't feel that was the central location. It should be in Gander or Grand Falls-Windsor; however, it is not simply a departmental decision. It's one that we have to collaborate with the chief judge of the Provincial Court with. What I can say is that while I have not spoken to her directly on it in some time, our

staff has talked to her repeatedly over the last number of months and years in terms of working this matter forward.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

**MS. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Mr. Speaker, the minister also said that opening a Family Violence Intervention Court in Labrador is more challenging.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: What specific actions have you taken to open both of these courts in the next two years?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

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

Thank you for the question. We've done quite a bit of work. It's simply not as easy as saying we're going to open this court and make it happen. You have to work within the court administration. You have to work with the judges involved.

What I can say is that we've made numerous trips to Labrador and to Central to work on establishing the location. Perhaps the biggest thing we've done towards making this happen is that in this year's budget we've allocated the money to make it happen.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

**MS. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Mr. Speaker, in the 2018 budget there was \$1 million budgeted for an inquiry into Innu children in care; however, this inquiry has not yet begun.

Can the minister, Mr. Speaker, please provide an update on consultations with the federal government and the Innu Nation about an inquiry?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

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

Certainly, the inquiry, as referenced by the Member across the way, is one that was committed to by this government; however, it's not simply as in other inquiries where it's simply a governmental decision. This one, as she referenced, requires consultation with the Innu government, as well as with the federal government, and that's something that's ongoing.

It also requires consultation, not just with the Department of Justice, but we have Intergovernmental Affairs, Indigenous Affairs, as well as Children, Seniors and Social Development. I can tell you it has certainly been a complex negotiation, as well as dealing with our federal government; however, the commitment to hold this inquiry is still there.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

**MS. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Mr. Speaker, can the minister please outline for this House how much has been budgeted in this fiscal year for the inquiry?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

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

I don't have that number offhand; however, it would have been in the budget Estimates that we debated last night. What I can say to my colleague is that I would have no problem providing for this House, even after Question Period and tabling here, the amount that has

been allocated under that particular budget line item.

Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Harbour Main.

**MS. CONWAY OTTENHEIMER:** Mr. Speaker, when does the minister intend to release the terms of reference and start the inquiry?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Justice and Public Safety.

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

Again, it's not simply as in when we did the Muskrat Falls Inquiry or the Dunphy inquiry where all the decision-making rests within the provincial government. This requires negotiation with the federal government, as well as with the Innu governments, and that's something that's been going on.

So it's not simply a decision that could be made by us and we dictate exactly how it's going to happen. There's a cost part to this that the federal government has promised that they will be a part of; we're still working on that. What I can say is that we were proud of the commitment that we've done here and, certainly, it's not our government that is holding this up.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Prior to the election, we heard the heart-breaking story of a woman who wouldn't have her insulin pump covered by Medicare under the government's new policy because it doesn't cover people who lost their coverage when they turned 25, and she is not alone.



Will the government do the right thing and cover an insulin pump for all people with Type 1 diabetes, regardless of age?

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

**MR. HAGGIE:** Thank you very much for the question.

Insulin pump coverage was a subject of discussion prior to the budget from a variety of groups. We did what we were asked to do, which was to raise the age limit. We have abolished the age limit for insulin pumps.

This is the first step. What we are going to do now is two things: One is to look at the program to get better value for the dollars that we spend; and the second, then, is to see how in a phased and balanced approach we can expand coverage for people with Type 1 diabetes.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Research indicates people who use the insulin pump have better outcomes over the long term, and that means not only a better quality of life but lower costs for health systems.

Why won't this government invest wisely in preventative care that reduces complication and cost for all who need insulin pumps?

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

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

I don't disagree with my colleague on the outcome and the ultimate goal. I think they are important goals. I think the only difference that we have is how fast we get there and what route we take.

We have outlined a balanced, phased-in approach which is fiscally responsible, and I think we have to cut our coat according to the

cloth we have. These are decisions we have to make, and I'm happy to engage in discussions if he can find ways to speed the process up, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

**MR. BRAZIL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As they say, penny-wise and pound foolish when it comes to health care and savings in the long term.

The province's medical students chose the insulin pump issue as their primary issue this year, and the Health Minister left the impression he was listening.

Why doesn't he listen to the medical students and the countless others who are calling on the government to do the right thing?

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

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

The medical students were very effective in lobbying, as they had been in the previous year with another issue which we helped them with. From this point of view, we did exactly what we were asked to do, which was to abolish the age limit on insulin pumps. This we have done.

I have said here and I have said in public that this is a first step on expanding coverage for the insulin pump program. We have to do it in a balanced way that is fiscally responsible and allows us to get the best value for our dollar.

We are doing that, Mr. Speaker,

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

**MR. BRAZIL:** A section of the new kidney centre at Eastern Health has been closed because of mould impacting six dialysis units.

Can the minister give us an update on the situation?

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

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

There was a leak discovered last month in an area of the kidney centre in Mount Pearl. That has been remediated. As part of that process, mould was found in the wall. That part has been closed. Alternative arrangements have been made. Dialysis continues uninterrupted, and as soon as remediation has been achieved on that pod that's closed, the service will resume as normal, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Opposition House Leader.

**MR. BRAZIL:** The centre which was recently opened had undergone renovations prior to the opening.

Is this minister concerned that Eastern Health has leased a facility that contains mould?

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

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

My advice from experts and officials is that this was a consequence of a leak. The leak has been remedied. The mould has been remediated. I will undertake to provide the Member opposite with the latest time estimate for when the work will be complete and that pod will be reopened.

Dialysis is continuing uninterrupted, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The Leader of the Third Party.

**MS. COFFIN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, we understand in Labrador West in recent months there have been multiple suicide attempts and multiple suicides. It would appear the DoorWays pilot project is not addressing the more serious, long-term mental health and addictions issues in this community.

I ask the Minister of Health and Community Services: Is he aware of this problem, and what is he doing to address it?

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

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

We responded in 2016, I think it was, to a rash of death by suicide. We had a very successful relationship with a variety of groups. It was a community effort that helped manage that.

My understanding is that through Labrador-Grenfell, should the need arise, there are additional resources that can be brought into play, and I will undertake to provide an accounting of those from L-GH tomorrow, or as early as I can get it.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The Leader of the Third Party.

**MS. COFFIN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

People in Labrador West are asking for more psychological and psychiatric services, as well as better access to addictions and rehabilitation. We have heard of people personally spending thousands of dollars to get timely treatment in other provinces.

Will the minister immediately address this crisis in Labrador West by improving mental health and addictions treatments?

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

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

Labrador-Grenfell has been successful, I understand, in retaining the services of two full-time psychiatrists. One will travel and the other will have a less onerous travelling schedule, because that has been negotiated with them. We are rolling out addictions hubs as part of the next phase of *Towards Recovery* and the locations of those are left to the discretion of the regional health authority. Obviously, they will do a needs assessment and, if appropriate, one will be placed in Labrador West.

The issue of further support would be reassessed on an as-needed basis, Mr. Speaker. If there are further representations from the community to Labrador-Grenfell Health, obviously they will listen to those.

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

**MR. J. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We are starting to see evidence in departments of downsizing of government's attrition policy in the form of staff burnout and reduction of services.

I ask the Minister of Finance: What measures is his government prepared to take to ensure that attrition will not interfere with services going forward?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Human Resource Secretariat.

**MR. OSBORNE:** I thank the Member for his question. Mr. Speaker, we've been practising attrition responsibly as a government over the past couple of years. We've reduced the size of the public service primarily through attrition. But we have not allowed our focus on attrition to interfere with the delivery of services that the people of the province rely on.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for St. John's Centre for a quick question, please.

**MR. J. DINN:** By definition, attrition means that when a staff person leaves they are not replaced.

So I ask the minister: What measures is his government taking to ensure that the remaining staff are not overburdened?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister Responsible for the Human Resource Secretariat for a quick response, please.

**MR. OSBORNE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I thank him, for the question. It's an important issue. What we've been doing is as people retire, some of them – most of them, in fact, are replaced. But we do look at positions to determine what positions, Mr. Speaker, are no longer needed or those responsibilities can be redistributed. So most of the individuals that retire from the province, the positions are replaced.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands.

**MR. JOYCE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

(Inaudible) three main issues discussed at the doors in the recent election in Humber - Bay of Islands.

I ask the Premier: When will the announcement for the new regional hospital with a radiation unit be made? And, like many provincial governments like Quebec, Manitoba, Alberta and British Columbia, will you be implementing a community benefit policy so local tradespeople and labourers have priority to the work in Corner Brook to remain home with their families as in your Way Forward?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Premier.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, obviously, like most people across this province and like most people, especially those on the West Coast, are looking forward, finally, to see the announcement become a reality, become action. I think the Member opposite

would agree that we sat through many announcements over the last eight, nine, 10 years or so about the Corner Brook hospital, but I will tell you this administration will be delivering the new Corner Brook hospital, the replacement for the Western Memorial Regional Hospital with radiation, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**PREMIER BALL:** And going back to the previous question, this is Public Service Week, Mr. Speaker, for all our workers that provide the great services to people in Newfoundland and Labrador. I will tell you, the hospital in Corner Brook will be staffed by public sector workers as well. So, Mr. Speaker, we're looking forward, we're going through the process now with TW. Within the next few weeks, we should be prepared to make the announcement, to make it official that hospital will be replaced.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**MR. LANE:** Mr. Speaker, for the last number of months, there have been questions asked and concerns raised both inside and outside this hon. House regarding the arrangement between Canopy Growth and a numbered company on Plank Road, which appears to have indirectly benefited from government's \$40 million tax break to Canopy.

Arrangements such as this can give rise to the perception of conflict of interest, political pork-barrelling and calls into question government's responsibility to be open and transparent when it comes to expenditures of taxpayers' money.

I therefore ask the hon. Premier: Will he bring legislation before the House that would require that any numbered company in receipt of government grants, unrepayable loans, tax breaks or other benefits, either directly or indirectly, to publicly disclose the names of the directors of that company?

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Minister of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation.

**MR. MITCHELMORE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If any numbered company is doing business directly with government, we can reveal and provide the directors and all that information. The company that the Member opposite is talking about is not doing business with government, so it is not something that we can reveal because we have no relationship with that particular company.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The time for Oral Questions has ended.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees.

**Presenting Reports by Standing and Select Committees**

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

**MR. LOVELESS:** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Select Committee appointed to draft a reply to the speech from Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor, I am pleased to present the report of the Select Committee which reads as follows:

To Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor, the hon. Judy M. Foote:

May it please Your Honour, we, the Commons of Newfoundland and Labrador in legislative session assembled, beg to thank Your Honour for the Gracious Speech which Your Honour has addressed to this House.

I move, second by the Member for Mount Scio, that the report be adopted.

**MR. SPEAKER:** When shall the report be received?

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Now.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Now.

On motion, report received.

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

**MR. A. PARSONS:** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Natural Resources, that the debate be deferred.

**MR. SPEAKER:** It is the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Aye.

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

The motion is carried.

Further reports by standing and select committees?

Tabling of Documents.

Notices of Motion.

Answers to Questions for which Notice has been Given.

Petitions.

### Petitions

**MR. SPEAKER:** Time for a petition.

The hon. the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands.

**MR. JOYCE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I read the petition: WHEREAS the successful proponents for the new hospital in Corner Brook are scheduled to be announced this spring with construction anticipated to begin in the fall and, as this is estimated to be a four-year construction period, and as there are experienced local tradespeople and labourers in the area.

THEREFORE we, the undersigned, petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: To urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to encourage companies that are awarded the contracts for the new hospital to hire local

tradespeople and labourers, at no extra costs to the taxpayers, so that they can work in their own area, support the local economy and be able to return home to their families every evening.

Mr. Speaker, I just found out that the Premier wouldn't even answer that question – local workers in Corner Brook, when I asked the question, will you try to implement local workers, the Premier of the province wouldn't even answer it. How disgusting is that for the local workers who have to move away? And he is up saying people have to keep families home. You wouldn't even answer the question. You wouldn't even give them the courtesy of saying we're going to try to get local people. That's shameful.

Last year, when John Allan, the leader of the Liberal Party, the unofficial leader of the Liberal Party, the unregistered lobbyist was working with me to get local people on behalf of the Premier, told me the local people will be hired. They weren't hired.

Today, the Premier of this province, stood up today when I asked the question, wouldn't even give the workers, the local workers the courtesy of an answer. He's over there smiling. It's shameful. It's actually shameful that here we have a four-year project at the hospital in Corner Brook and we're trying to get local workers, and we can't even get the government, the Premier himself, to try to get local workers like they do in other provinces. It's actually shameful.

Last year, I was told by John Allan, he was telling me – and the Premier can take it up with him – that he was doing this on behalf of the Premier. He told me local people were hired. I was a fool. I was a fool to walk up in front of the cameras and say yes, they'd be hiring local people; hand in your résumé. That never happened. I will not be fooled this year.

The workers in Western Newfoundland deserve to work at the hospital. They are excellent tradespeople. They were even willing to put in \$100,000 last year, from one union, to make sure it didn't cost the project any extra money and the company didn't lose any money, yet, no, we had to bring people in. Our local tradespeople had to drive by every day while they're going to the boat or going to the airport to catch it.

We have to try to keep local people working in the area. A four-year project, four years. Trained, professional local people can't even get hired, and we can't get a government to try to work with the companies to get local people hired. A lot of those local people are going to be in the Corner Brook District, and I know the Member for Corner Brook agrees with me. They're going to be down in Port au Port. They're going to be out in other areas. They're going to be in the Baie Verte area. They're going to be down in the Northern Peninsula area. So we've got to work together, we've got to get local people.

So I offer this petition on behalf of the people, Mr. Speaker, in Western Newfoundland.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Premier for a response, please.

**PREMIER BALL:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Well, of course, as a government we want to make sure as many local people get jobs in our communities as possible. I wasn't smiling, Mr. Speaker – I have to correct that for the Member opposite – at all. Because this is a very serious issue. Number one, we need to get the hospital replaced. We all know there are many unionized workers that work on those job sites as well.

I think what the Member opposite is suggesting is that what we should do would be to take companies like Island Roofing and Brook Construction that operate out of Corner Brook and tell them they cannot work on projects in places like Gander. Is that what the Member opposite is suggesting we should do? Is that what he talks about when he says about a local benefits plan, therefore it would only be companies like Brook and the engineering companies that operate great businesses in Corner Brook? It's just not Corner Brook, it's all of the West Coast, Mr. Speaker.

We want to make sure that locals get hired, and, yes, we did have a conversation with eight ironworkers last year, and it was a union that offered to pay the \$100,000 to help support that. Yes, we want to get local people working, Mr. Speaker, but we also want to make sure that those local companies like Brook, Island

Roofing and others can operate and competitively compete for tenders in other areas as well. I think the Member would agree with that.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

Another petition?

The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl - Southlands.

**MR. LANE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. JOYCE:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**MR. LANE:** There have been numerous concerns raised by family members of seniors in long-term care throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, particularly those suffering with dementia, Alzheimer's disease and other cognitive debilitating conditions whereby loved ones have experienced injuries, have not been regularly bathed, not received proper nutrition, and who have been left lying in their own waste for an extended period of time. We believe this is directly related to government's failure to ensure adequate staffing at those facilities.

THEREFORE we petition the hon. House of Assembly as follows: To urge the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to instate legislation which includes the mandatory establishment of an adequate ratio of one staff to three residents in long-term care and other applicable regional health facilities housing persons with dementia, Alzheimer's disease and other cognitive debilitating conditions in order to ensure appropriate safety, protection from injuries, proper hygiene care and all other required care. This law would include the creation of a specific position in these facilities for monitoring and intervention as required to ensure the safety of patients.

Mr. Speaker, the petition I have here today is signed by people from Labrador City and Wabush. Again, I present this on behalf of Advocates for Senior Citizens' Rights, with petitions that I presented in the last sitting of the House daily. Ms. Goulding-Collins reached out to me today and asked if I would continue doing

that through this session of the House of Assembly. I've agreed to do so. It's an issue that's very important to her, it's very important to the thousands of members of her group that have loved ones in long-term care.

This is not about – and I want to keep emphasizing it because from time to time the minister will stand and say that this is somehow taking a shot or discrediting the staff at these facilities, it is not. It is simply about making sure that on these units where there are patients with Alzheimer's and dementia and so on, where they're at risk of harming themselves, they're not able to feed themselves and so on, making sure there are appropriate staffing levels at all times to take care of these people.

It could be my mom or dad, it could be one of yours. It could be your grandparents. One of these days, if we live long enough, it could be one of us, and it's important that we make sure that the seniors of our province are taken care of. That's what they're asking. That's what this petition is all about, and I will continue to present it.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

### Orders of the Day

#### Private Members' Day

**MR. SPEAKER:** This being Wednesday, I now call on the Member for Windsor Lake to stand in his place and present the resolution, resolution 7.

The hon. the Member for Windsor Lake.

**MR. CROSBIE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm pleased to move the following private Member's resolution, which is seconded by my colleague from Conception Bay South.

BE IT RESOLVED that the Standing Orders Committee be directed to undertake a scan of Question Period rules and procedures in various jurisdictions and bring forward for consideration during the fall sitting of 2019 a recommendation to amend the Standing Orders of the House respecting Oral Questions to require ministers to

answer questions in a manner which is brief and to the point and relevant and responsive to the question.

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

**MR. CROSBIE:** As Members know, this was an important commitment our party made during the election campaign as we focused on the need for jobs and hope, affordable life in Newfoundland and Labrador and honest government. Some people may ask: Why is something like this important? How can it be placed in the same category as jobs and affordability of life? The answer goes to the heart of our political system. We don't have a system where one party has absolute authority to govern and impose its will on the people. Some jurisdictions have such a system.

History is full of examples of kings and conquerors, some of them good, some of them terrible, ayatollahs and caliphs, factious dictators, socialist dictators, communist dictators, military juntas. Ours is based on a different premise that governments work best when they are constantly challenged and constantly held to account by parties that are ready to step into the void if particular administration is found wanting.

Our democratic system is not easy to manage. At times it is utterly chaotic and mired in gridlock. As Sir Winston Churchill said on Armistice Day, 1947: "Many forms of Government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed it has been said that democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."

One reason democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others, is that the history of democracy shows a willingness to constantly experiment, evolve and improve. Democratic reform and improvement ought to be high on our list of priorities at all times. It should not be put to one side on the excuse of being too busy, as it was for four years under the government opposite.

Question Period has evolved to be – I misspoke myself, I meant to say: the effect of this PMR

will be to put one element of democratic reform on the front burner and require action. The House of Commons compendium of procedure says: “The right to seek information and the right to hold the Government accountable are recognized as fundamental to our system of parliamentary government.”

In the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, Marleau and Montpetit write: “The importance of questions within the parliamentary system cannot be overemphasized, and the search for or clarification of information through questioning is a vital aspect of the duties undertaken by individual Members.”

They add a quote from Wilding, N. and Laundy, *An Encyclopedia of Parliament*, which states: “Nothing could more weaken the control of Parliament over the executive than the abolition or curtailment of the right of a Member of Parliament to ask a question in the House.”

So Question Period has evolved to be fundamental to our parliamentary system, fundamental to parliamentary democracy. The parliamentary rules recognize the challenges every speaker faces in trying to manage Question Period. These are general guidelines but they are not immune to improvement as Marleau and Montpetit state: “Question Period is a free-wheeling affair, with tremendous spontaneity and vitality.”

Nonetheless, the rules have evolved over time and various jurisdictions have experimented with certain reforms. The United Kingdom Parliament has instituted questions to the prime minister on a specific day, there are questions to the Leader of the House on another day and different departments are scrutinized on different days as governed by a rotating list.

The rotating list would not be needed in a provincial jurisdiction where most ministers attend Question Periods most of the time, except on rare occasions. But the UK example shows that it is possible to alter the rules to require answers of certain ministers. It’s something that could be done if we were to decide to do it.

Many of the Members here will be familiar with the name Michael Chong, the MP for the Riding

of Wellington – Halton Hills. He’s a long-time champion of democratic reform, with ideas that I believe have great merit. He wrote a piece for the *Globe and Mail* in September 2010 entitled: The increasing disconnect between Canadians and their Parliament.

He asked: “So how do we restore Parliament’s relevance to Canadians? A first, but important, step should begin with the reform of Question Period.” He questioned the decent of the House of Commons into political rhetoric, insults and screaming, comparing it to a gladiator event at the Roman Colosseum.

One of Mr. Chong’s proposed reforms was to – I quote – “require that ministers respond to questions directed at them ....” Others were to – quote – “dedicate Wednesday exclusively for questions to the prime minister, and to dedicate the rest of the week for questions to ministers other than the prime minister.”

He moved a motion that “the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs will be ordered to consider these reforms and report back recommended changes to the House within six months.”

Writing sometime later in the Canadian Parliamentary review, Michael Chong, along with some others, said he received letters of support from across the country. Regrettably, the motion died with the dissolution of Parliament for the May 2011 general election.

Mr. Chong wrote: Teachers have told me that the level of behaviour in Question Period is such that they will not take their classes here anymore. This is the sure sign that Question Period needs to be reformed.

I should say that the temper and roguishness of debate in this Chamber, I think, has not quite reached that level witnessed the class from Roncalli that just attended. However, it is still in need of much improvement.

He added again: “Question Period has become a time where behaviour that is not permitted in any boardroom, dining room, or classroom regularly occurs here in the people’s room. As a result, there is a growing divide between Canadians who are becoming more and more



apolitical and a Parliament that is becoming more and more partisan.

“We, as members of Parliament, need to bridge that gap by reforming Parliament and regaining the respect of Canadians.”

Whatever the situation elsewhere, the melees afflicting our Question Period are not insults and screaming, but stonewalling. The reform that I am focusing on with this resolution is to require ministers to answer questions in a manner which is brief and to the point, and relevant and responsive to the question.

There is already a stipulation on page 30 of the *Members' Parliamentary Guide* of May 2019, which states: “Questions are meant to elicit information and should be brief and to the point, as should answers, in order to allow the maximum number of questions to be asked.”

Our own Standing Order 26(3) states: “... in answering any such question, the Minister is not to debate the matter to which it refers.”

Marleau and Monpetit state the general observation that: “Since the Speaker retains sole discretion in determining the time that individual questions and answers my take, the Chair may interrupt any Member consuming more than a reasonable share of time in posing or responding to a question.”

They continue: “While it is not the Chair’s responsibility to determine the length of answers given during Question Period, the Speaker has pointed out to the House that, in the interests of fairness, questions should be as concise of possible in order to encourage answers of similar brevity and thereby allow the Chair to recognize as many Members as possible.”

Of course in some jurisdictions, and ours is one, we have specific time limits for questions and answers to better ensure concision, brevity and recognition of Members.

Marleau and Montpetit quote former Speaker Bosley who said: “Time is scarce and should, therefore, be used as profitably as possible by as many as possible. The public in large numbers do watch, and the House, recognizing that Question Period is often an intense time, should

be on its best possible behaviour. While there may be other purposes and ambitions involved in Question Period, its primary purpose must be the seeking of information from the government and calling the government to account for its actions. Members should be given the greatest possible freedom in the putting of questions that is consistent with the other principles.”

The current rules and practices do not allow the Opposition to determine which Member responds to a question, and there is currently no requirement for anyone to answer at all.

Marleau and Montpetit state: “Members may not insist on an answer nor may a Member insist that a specific Minister respond to his or her question. A Minister’s refusal to answer a question may not be questioned or treated as the subject of a point of order or question of privilege.”

Clearly, the UK has gotten around that rule by designating particular days for particular ministers to respond.

Why do we need such a reform? The answer should be obvious to anyone who sat through or viewed the broadcast of Question Period over the last year.

Regularly, our questions to one minister were taken by another, but not answered. I’m thinking of our questions to the Finance Minister following up on his commitment to seek the identity of the shareholders of a certain numbered company connected to Canopy Growth, another minister took the questions but never once answered. It is particularly abusive to hear ministers give long rhetorical tirades on matters completely different from those raised.

Even when the questions were brief and direct with no preambles, the answers had nothing to do with what was asked. They were not answers at all. This is not acceptable behaviour. It undermines our constitutional role as the Official Opposition and contributes to public cynicism about politics, politicians and the democratic process.

We across the aisle have constitutional obligations to hold the government to account. It’s our function to ask challenging questions

and the government's function, during Question Period, to be responsive and relevant in their answers. I believe we need rule changes to ensure that happens. If we work collectively on these rule changes and vote collectively to pass them, then we will be more likely to abide by them. And that will promote the status of democracy as the worst of all forms of government, except for all the others.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for St. George's - Humber.

**MR. REID:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It's great to have an opportunity to speak to this motion today. I just want to take a few minutes to add to the debate here today.

First of all, this is my first opportunity to speak in this new session of the House of Assembly. It's great to be here, and I want to thank the people of St. George's - Humber for returning me again to the House of Assembly. It's an honour and privilege to represent them here in this House and I'll do my best over the time that we have here to represent their interests here in this House.

Standing Orders, parliamentary procedure, democratic reform is something that I've been interested in for quite a while. Interested in, first of all, as a staffer in the government Members' office back in the early '90s, learning and watching the happenings here in the House. Also, teaching courses in political science at Memorial University, I had a great opportunity to discuss why we do things the way we do in democracies and how that is important to and connected to people's lives in this province, and in other jurisdictions as well. So it's great to have an opportunity to participate in this debate today.

The word parliament has its origins in the French word "parler." Parliament is the place where we come to talk about issues that are important to the people of this province. It's a place where we come to talk. The Standing Orders really are the way we regulate how we

talk to each other, how we talk about the way we want to proceed. It's really the rule book. It sets out the rules as to who talks, how long they talk for. It has sections for Question Period, it has sections for debate of legislation and it has petitions from the public. All those things are covered in the Standing Orders of the House.

It really sets out the playbook, of course, of the rules of how we're going to talk. So rather than everyone talking at the same time, no one listening, it sets out the rules as to how we're going to talk to each other, and that's why the Standing Orders are so important.

We also have precedents. We have precedents in this House, how we've operated in the past, how we've done things in the past here in this House. Also, in times of when we're not sure how to proceed or if there are issues related to how we should proceed in this House and what the rules should be, we also look at the precedence from other legislatures across Canada, parliament, but also other jurisdictions, such as the UK and parliaments there. We look to those sources of ways of determining how we're going to conduct our affairs here in this House.

The Standing Orders are a fundamental piece of how we operate here in this House. So the Standing Orders are very important, and the way we establish our Standing Orders is through the Standing Orders Committee. We've had a Standing Orders Committee since this House has been in place. The House is also a public forum as well, so we're guided as well by how people perceive what we do here in many ways.

I want to just take a few minutes to look at this resolution and just to sort of get into the aspects of the resolution and the implications of the resolution.

The resolution says: "BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Standing Orders Committee be directed to undertake a scan of Question Period rules and procedures in various jurisdictions ...." Fine enough. We can do that without a resolution, even.

The Standing Orders Committee is an all-party committee, people come from all parties. They get together, meet. We can look at what other jurisdictions do without a resolution like this.

We don't have to be directed by the House. Members from either party can bring that up. We can have a discussion, but it's fine to put it in the form of a resolution of the House. Maybe it could be argued that it has more force because the whole House has directed that it be done.

So we're looking at: "various jurisdictions and bring forward for consideration during the fall sitting of 2019 a recommendation to amend the Standing Orders of the House respecting Oral Questions ...." So that part of the resolution in my mind sort of prejudices what the outcome of the review is going to be and what the discussion of the review is going to be.

It already sort of indicates that we're going to bring forward for consideration in the fall sitting recommendations to amend the Standing Orders. Maybe if we do the review, the committee considers it, maybe there won't be any – the determination will be that there's no need for amendments to the Standing Orders. So the resolution, it's a little problematic there for me in terms that it prejudices what the outcome will be before we've even undertaken the task.

The other part of the resolution is: "to require Ministers to answer questions in a manner which is brief and to the point and relevant and responsive to the question." So that sounds reasonable enough, but when you look at – okay, it's easy to say you want relevant and responsive answers, but who determines what is relevant and what is responsive? Who determines when that has happened?

The other aspects of "brief and to the point" you could put a quantitative sort of time to how long an answer is but, really, is that a good way to do it when a short question sometimes requires a long answer or something like that? So it's difficult to sort of implement that aspect of the resolution, in my opinion. So I'm ready to be convinced that this is an undertaking that we should do, but I'm not really there yet in terms of thinking that we need to support this resolution to bring about these positive changes.

The House is a public forum, so I ask who would determine if responses have been relevant or if they have been responsive to the question. I guess, really, it's the public who determine that. This House is a public forum and people watch

it. They see how people conduct their affairs, they look at the questions that people ask and they look at the answers that are given. That becomes part of how they decide how they're going to vote. So I'm a little bit sort of perplexed as to whether we should restrict that in any way in terms of the way we conduct our affairs here.

Also, I think the rules are flexible enough to allow Members to ask supplementary questions. So if you don't get a good answer to your first question you ask again, you have an opportunity to point out that you didn't get a response, and sometimes two or three supplementaries are allowed. Also, the House allows for written questions on the Order Paper. That practice has fallen out of usage here in this House, but we have those possibilities as well. You can also use debate in the House to comment on the responsiveness or the relevancy of the answers that you've received in Question Period.

I'm not sure how workable this is but it's an interesting concept, it's worth discussing, worth having some debate on here today. I compliment the Member, the Leader of the Official Opposition, for bringing this forward so we can have a bit of a debate on it today and decide how we go forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

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

**MR. J. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We would welcome a jurisdictional scan in the hope that it could show us how Question Period can be improved. We have pledged to the people of this province that the House of Assembly will act more collaboratively. This has to extend to the rules around Question Period. Question Period needs to be less adversarial and rhetorical, and more direct and informative.

Too often when a Member asks a straightforward question, he or she gets an answer that is relevant or not helpful. There is a standing joke around the House of Assembly that it's Question Period, not answer period.

A good example comes from last year when a minister was asked who made the decision to hire a top executive in a public body without a merit-based competition. The minister expressed pleasure at the appointment and proceeded to not answer subsequent questions for several days about who made the decision to hire a former political staffer for this publicly funded position.

But we need to reform the whole process of Question Period, not just answers but questions too. Questions need to be requests for real information and not platforms for making rhetorical political points. We need to ensure that questions from Members are, in fact, answerable and that the answers are relevant to the questions asked.

This issue has come up in the House of Commons many times. In 2014, the NDP tabled a motion to change House rules to allow the Speaker to put a halt to irrelevant and repetitive answers. The *Toronto Star* analyzed a weeks' worth of Question Periods and found that irrelevant rhetoric and talking points were the norm as responses to various questions. The authors note that in our Canadian parliamentary democracy, Question Period is supposed to be a venue for the Assembly to hold government to account and it's a key part of our democracy.

Therefore, we are in favour of the scrutiny called for in this private Member's motion. However, we would like to put forward an amendment in the spirit of a more comprehensive review and a revision of Question Period that would focus on questions as well as answers.

My proposed amendment reads as follows: BE IT RESOLVED that the Standing Orders Committee be directed to undertake a scan of Question Period rules and procedures in various jurisdictions and bring forward for consideration during the fall sitting of 2019 a recommendation to amend the Standing Orders of the House respecting Oral Questions, which would include, but would not be limited to, a requirement that ministers answer questions in a manner which is brief and to the point and relevant and responsive to the question.

Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

I apologize to the hon. Member – a rookie mistake back in the Assembly.

The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**MR. PETTEN:** There's an amendment, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Oh, I'm sorry. I apologize.

This House will stand in recess to consider the said amendment.

### Recess

**MR. SPEAKER (Reid):** Order, please!

The motion is in order.

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

**MR. J. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I will be brief, in keeping with the spirit of the amendment. I've laid out some of the rationale already, but it comes down to this. If we're looking at reforming Question Period or any procedure here, then it should be looking at the procedure as a whole, and not a piecemeal approach.

There are many jurisdictions, not only within Canada, and I think, some, the Leader of the Official Opposition has mentioned; but I think if we're going to scan, let's scan not only other Westminster forms of government, but other governments as well: territorial governments, governments that may not have this particular form of parliamentary-style government.

If there's a way that we can improve Question Period so that there's a free exchange of information without fear – I understand the politics, but if we can take the politics out of this, maybe there's a way here that we can actually get the information that we need. Too often we can be gun shy about making decisions, about making comments because of the backlash, but here it's also about holding them accountable as to what decisions are being made, on what basis are the decisions, what is the information that the government has that we need to have to determine if, indeed, the

decisions that they're making are adequate, are right for the situation.

So we agreed, it was in the Budget Speech, it's been many of the speeches of the leaders at the opening here about the need to collaborate. People have made it very clear that they want to see this. We have a minority government; it's going to require an awful lot of work on all our parts to make it work. In some ways, whatever we get – in acquiring something, we give up a little bit of something else. So here we don't get to be as adversarial – we do, but right now we know that if we were too adversarial, we bring government down, we're back into an election and we haven't progressed anywhere but we have a real opportunity – this is an experiment in many ways.

I've heard tell that minority governments don't last too long, 18 months, 24 months, two years; but maybe there's an opportunity here that we can make this last the full term. But it's going to mean that on all our parts we're going to have to work together. So here's an opportunity I think that when we look at, in this amendment, not just to look at it piecemeal but to look at the whole process of Question Period and how we can make it better. Not to direct simply the Committee to come out with one recommendation, one recommendation only, but to look at the whole process. Look at the question and the answer, and maybe other things in between.

For that reason, I urge you to support the amendment.

Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Conception Bay South.

**MR. PETTEN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to speak on this debate today, on our proposal of a new measure for democratic and parliamentary reform. Before I start though, before I go into it, I just want to recognize all these new Members are getting up and they don't sound like new Members. I haven't heard of one yet that sounded new to me, so I want to commend them on that. I know when I first got up to speak in this House there

was a lot of mumbling, so they've done quite well.

The reform of the Question Period, Mr. Speaker, will strengthen the accountability, which is something this House and this province badly needs. In considering this resolution, you got to ask two questions: Can we do it and should we do this? I believe the first answer is yes, we can. Our Standing Orders take precedence in defining how things work in this House and we have the power to amend them by agreement.

The change we are talking about may be unprecedented for this House or any House, but that doesn't mean we can't lead making such a reform. Plenty of parliamentary rules have changed over the years. When the rule changes the Parliament that makes the change is the one taking the lead in making that reform. Other Parliaments may follow, but it takes one to lead. Why shouldn't we be the ones to take the lead in democratic and parliamentary reform?

The primary purpose of Question Period is for the Opposition to fulfill its constitutional obligation to hold government to account. We are not doing this because we are seeking attention, we are doing this because it's our job, it's our role, our function, our obligation, our responsibility to do what the people elected us to do. When we seek answers and we're instead given rhetoric or subjected to personal attacks or treated to speeches that have nothing to do with the questions asked and the information we're seeking, that can be considered an abuse of Parliament.

And on that note, I want to reiterate or remind, I sat for years on the government side working with the various ministers. I know what each minister prepares every day on a daily basis, I sat in the same boardrooms with them ministers (inaudible) with previous ministers, I understand what's required and I understand the work that goes into it for the staff, for the officials, the executive, the ministers. I understand, too, what it's like for a minister to be faced with questions, sometimes not being able to give the right answer, not being able to give the answer that's required, not being able to give the answer that the Members opposite are asking, and Opposition for that matter.

I used to always think when I used to be with the previous government, back in pre-2015, it's not a bad thing to say you don't know the answer. I always say it's never bad to see you make a mistake; it was never a bad thing to say you don't know the answer. And I know it's not always nice, the minister doesn't feel right or appropriate or they may feel inefficient by saying I don't know the answer, but I don't see it as a sign of weakness. I see it as a sign of being confident enough to say, you know, I do not know the answer.

I say that many times if someone asks me. I knocked on doors for three or four weeks in the last General Election and a lot of people come to me, ask me questions, I didn't know the answer to a lot of them. I wasn't afraid to say that, but I'll get back to you; I'll seek the answer. Most people, generally, and us in politics, people will respect you getting back to them with an answer. Whether they agree with you or not, at least you gave them an answer, and if they feel you're giving them an honest answer, they'll move on.

But some of the stuff you get faced with in this House on a daily basis, it can run thin. I know Members on the government side now that sat on the Opposition benches, they experienced the same thing and the same frustrations that we feel sometimes when asking the questions opposite. There were various ministers in the previous administration back in pre-2015, they were masters. I wouldn't name names but I'm sure people in this House know, they'd get up forever and they'd never answer the question. They were here for years and they never answered a question. But is that right? That's the question we're asking. That's what democratic reform is about.

Is doing what we did in the past the proper thing to do now? That's the question at hand. That's not to say it was right or wrong. It has gone on for generations, no matter what party has been in power. That process has always been in place. That's the way you do it.

A good minister is a minister that can get up and not answer the question. I've heard that said. The best ministers were the ones who could get up in a very controversial situation and be faced with question after question after question, grilling day after day after day and come out of

it pretty well unscathed. You were the best minister. In actual fact, that minister never provided any answers. That's how they survived it. Because in some of those situations, if you had to give the proper answers you probably wouldn't have gotten through those several days. You probably would have got through the first day, probably the second, but you would never have survived the onslaught on some of these serious issues.

So as much as we'd like to see democratic reform, and this is our motion and we support it, I understand from the other side, being over there behind the scenes, that it's not always easy. I do think the way out for that for most ministers is, say you don't know the answer. Say you'll check with your officials. Say you'll get back to them. If something is sensitive, tell the Member opposite we can meet and discuss that. I'll have you – we can come to my office, I'd like to discuss that in person, and then explain the reasons why you can't be saying this publicly. It may be sensitive information. I think most people would appreciate that, and that would be pretty commendable on all sides.

You hear some of the remarks, and I'm hoping to hear less this session of the former administration, because they'll be talking about themselves, because they're in their second term now. So I'm glad – and I think the general public answered loud and clear during the general election, they've heard enough of that. They don't want to hear anymore blame games. They don't want to hear anymore finger pointing. They want us to govern, they want us to work together and they want us to be collaborative.

So when we're in this Parliament, we're in a minority Parliament, we're going to be asking questions. There are 20 on this side and 20 on that side. They're going to want answers, and they deserve answers, because, ultimately, the people are the reason we're in this House. That's why we're all standing here, sitting here in this House today, is the people put us here. They gave everyone a clear message, they gave the province a clear message. They want us to come in here, they want us to do things and do it right, do it better.

That's what this private Member's motion is about, Mr. Speaker, from my perspective. I think most people in the province, if you asked them the question, they will say the same thing. It's loud and clear, there's no doubt about it. The message is delivered, and I think government opposite should have gotten it if they never. I think they should have it. I don't think there's any doubt; whether they won't admit it or not, that's a separate thing. Again, here we go, they won't answer the question. But I think they get the message.

It's one that I think we all need to try to rise above. I think we all can be better. Anytime there's criticism of the House of Assembly, it's not criticism of government, it is criticism of 40 Members. An example – and I hate to even mention it because it was a time that I'd rather forget, but during the harassment issue that went through this House, there wasn't one Member in this House who felt good about it. I had no part in it. I never spoke on it. For a minute, I never spoke on it and for a reason, it was not involving me, but I did not feel good. Everything we do in this House reflects every one of us. No matter who you want to point the finger at, it reflects each and every one of us.

We're looking at democratic reform. We're talking about answering questions, a question and answer session. It's more than that. It's rising above, doing things differently, doing it better.

I understand as well, Mr. Speaker, we're on this side now, if times were to change and some Members on this side went over there in the front benches of Cabinet, they could be saying: Why did we do that? Why did we push for that? I don't think that's a bad thing. Whoever moves over on that side, it will make them better, and the public will appreciate it.

Realistically, we all ask questions in this House. Our questions in this House, a lot of them are coming from the general public. We get together and we make decisions. We talk about lots of things and we decide this is a good route to go with questions, but a lot of the questions we get and a lot of the concerns raised, which lead into questions, come from the general public. It comes from the every day people we represent.

Who's getting the most injustice served to them? It's the electorate, the people who voted us in. The minister can look great and stand up and spend 10 minutes in Question Period and answer nothing, but who suffers? The electorate. Their own constituents, our constituents, the people of this Province. I think that's something that bears repeating.

Mr. Speaker, questions that come up in this House – like, sometimes we want to know why one course of action was chosen rather than another; why one of the priorities is not getting attention. They want to know why the decision was made to cover insulin pumps for some people with Type 1 diabetes but not for others. They want to know why tens of millions of dollars in tax breaks was given to a billion dollar company while small local companies that wanted to compete were shut out. These are valid questions. These have been asked in this House. We have not gotten the answers.

They want to know why the supply we were promised under that deal is not being delivered, why a small local business went under because of that. This is one a lot of people want to know. This is one that at the doors, Mr. Speaker, I knew it would come up, but at the doors this question came up over and over again. Who owns the numbered company that's benefiting from the \$40 million in tax breaks?

I heard it, and I would say most Members in this House heard it. It was a very good question, and we're still trying to find out. We'll continue on. Eventually, we will find out what's coming out of 7 Plank Road. Eventually, we'll get there. That's all about asking questions in this House because it's public money. It's our right and it's our obligation.

They want to know why the company was getting the tax breaks. It doesn't seem to be following the agreement made to build the facility, clearly in the agreement, but there's something missing. The AG hopefully will find that out, but these are questions we're asking in this House. Obviously, we asked enough questions on those issues that the AG felt it important enough to look into it further, and look into the full cannabis industry in the province. So, even though we never got the answers from the government side, the AG was

listening and our request never went unnoticed. She is going to look into it, and we look forward to finding out more about that issue.

They want to know why officials were directed to make a certain piece of Crown land available on a priority basis. Instantly, a \$10 million, \$11-million piece of property, get that deal done within days – unimaginable, unheard of – for a very cheap price is what we're told.

They want to know why an ambulance got stuck on the highway because snow wasn't plowed. There were ambulances, several last year, stuck on the highway because the plows were not out. They weren't going out until early in the morning, so the ambulance was stuck for hours. All the while, residents that they were responsible for – in Whitbourne, for instance, their ambulance was stuck by Paddy's Pond most of the night. So the residents, if someone took sick in Whitbourne, they were at a very serious situation because the ambulance was not there. Again, it was another decision.

I, as critic for Transportation and Works, spent endless days in this House over and over again asking questions about snow-clearing operations, 24-hour snow-clearing operations; providing snow-clearing operations in the middle of the night. They're all valid questions. I asked questions on this as well. I never got answers. It was probably more of finger pointing and whatnot, but those people, those residents of Whitbourne and those ambulance operators, they never got their questions answered.

I was home in my bed, they were the ones on the highway. Whitbourne were the people without an ambulance service. I was home in my bed, I was comfortable. It wasn't about me. It was about them. It was about the people that are being affected.

Again, Mr. Speaker, that's the stuff that really we need to be looking at. We look at democratic reform; they want to know why bridges and potholes are left unrepaired. I make it a habit, my thing every day – I'm contacting the department on a new pothole every day.

I feel like I'm the pothole person, because every time I see a pothole I report it. They come and fix it, to their credit, but don't ask a question of

why the asphalt recycler is down. You might get an answer, you might get a valid answer. No, you'll be getting a lot of innuendos and accusations, and maybe it might be a situation: well, b'y, you spent all the money, we can't afford to buy – little do you know that asphalt is recycled. It's the stuff that's broken off the roads, they take the asphalt and recycle it. It's not new stuff. They put it in the asphalt recycler. The thing is that's the response you get, but people want answers. They want answers on lots of issues.

They want to know why a shipbuilding company went under and rural jobs were lost because the government took their work away. There were questions asked about that. I asked questions about that. We never got any answers.

They want to know why a person with connections to a party in power got a government job without fair and open competition – big question. The government opposite lost voters because of that. I know my colleague from Topsail – Paradise – I talked to several families – they would not go vote for the Liberal Party again because of that one issue. I was like, really? It kind of peaked my attention to say, you think bigger issues, that was the one single issue that drove them away from that party. I found that interesting, and it stuck with me, obviously.

They want to know, while that happened, why others were laid off. They want to know why a school project recommended by a school board was rejected while another project they didn't recommend is going ahead. These are fair questions.

They want to know why some children are being forced to walk to school in unsafe conditions when school buses pass right by them. My most popular thing I talk about, it's something I aggressively talk about is the 1.6-busing policy. I said before, I was elected in 2015, regardless, I've stuck to this issue and I'm going to continue to stick to it.

The minister and I spoke about it yesterday and it's a very open conversation. I cannot with a clear conscience, as a parent – my children are raised. I cannot, with a clear conscience, drive a four-lane highway and see young children, K to



6 children, walking to school, having to get to school in the middle of the winter in all conditions, with no sidewalks to get to elementary school, I cannot and I will not be quiet about it, Mr. Speaker. There's something that has to change. I don't care who is in power. I don't care what colour party is in power, that's an issue that I'm passionate about. My colleagues can tell you I'm passionate about it. I'm sure most Members on that government side can also know my passion for that issue.

When we ask questions, we want answers. We don't want outdated reports. We don't want what this one did. We don't want that oh, it's going to cost this. We don't want about what we've done. These children are still walking on these roads and in unsafe conditions. That's the answer – parents are home waiting for those answers. They want us to report back that we're listening but sometimes – people are listening to us ask the questions but they're not getting the answers. So I'll tell the government again, people listen, they want answers and they deserve answers.

Thank you very much.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

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

I want to thank the Leader of the Official Opposition for bringing this private Member's resolution today and for everybody's comments so far. This is a topic that's something that's of interest to me. I know it's obviously of interest to you, Mr. Speaker.

So I'm very happy to speak to it, to maybe give some background of why our position on this is the way it is, but also maybe to pass forward some encouraging words. Because at the end of the day, and I go back to what the Member for CBS just said, he referenced the fact that when it comes to this House of Assembly, what affects one of us in many ways affects all of us. So if we make this House better, it's not just for the government's benefit or the Official Opposition's benefit, or the Third Party or

independents, it's everybody. I'm certainly supportive of that.

I've listened very carefully to what everybody's had to say and I've made some notes. I apologize, I may not be as concise or organized as I want to be because I'm sort of jumping back and forth, but I have an issue with the resolution. I don't have an issue with the concept. In fact, I'm going to encourage that this is something that the Standing Orders Committee does review, but I'm going to give my reason from having an issue with supporting the resolution or the amendment today, but why I think we can still accomplish the same goals that are trying to be set out by the resolution.

The resolution when you read it, the issue I have is that it's directing that the Standing Orders Committee be directed to do the scan, the research, which is fine, and bring forward a consideration during the fall, a recommendation to amend the Standing Orders of the House in a certain way.

In many ways, in my opinion, the resolution is predetermining or prejudging what the Standing Orders Committee needs to do. I cannot support that. I'm not saying I don't support that Question Period or the House in general can be looked at and made better.

What I have an issue with is saying to a committee, this is what we want you to do, now go do that. What if the committee comes back and says: Well, actually this is what the other jurisdictions are saying so we should go there. I appreciate my colleague from St. John's Centre is trying to say the same thing. If we're going to have a look at it, we can't just make this one change, we have to look at it whole.

Now, I'll give some background. In the Standing Orders Committee – and I've been around. I'm going into my third term so I've had the benefit of sitting on both sides of the House, of asking the questions, of answering the questions and I can talk about just the House itself.

I agree with the Leader of the Official Opposition when he referenced Ottawa and referenced this House. I can tell you, anybody that has ever watched Parliament in Ottawa, and we talk about the raucousness in the House and

the insults, anybody who compares us to Ottawa has clearly never watched Ottawa. They have clearly not been there and taken part, because I can tell you, it's not even close to being similar. I think I could probably get some consensus or agreement there.

What I can also say is that this House is nothing similar to what it was when I got here in 2011, in terms of the demeanour, in terms of the conversation. Actually, I can remember the first private Member's resolution I brought up was actually to change the Standing Orders of the House, to put in a fixed schedule to that House. I got shouted at for three hours by the government at the time – three hours.

Now, I will say, nobody on the other side was a part of that shouting that I was aware of, I'm not trying to say it, but what I'm saying is I saw incidents of where Cabinet ministers threatened personal harm to Members of the Opposition. I heard that with my own ears. I had it threatened to me. It was much different. I bet you my colleagues across the way who sat here during that time, looking back as well, will say, you know what, yeah, it's a lot better now. There's certainly a greater level of respect amongst Members, it's a lot different. Even when people talk about heckling in the House, there's no heckling compared to what it was. We've grown, we've evolved and I think we've made it much better.

Now, when we talk about the House itself, the Standing Orders Committee, which has been in place forever, I know that they underwent a review in the 2000s, where they tried to do a wholesale change of the orders, it never got done. I can guarantee you, there was not even a meeting scheduled between 2011 and 2015, not one single meeting of the Standing Orders Committee. It just was not brought up; everybody seemed to be status quo.

There were times when we did try to make a change. One of the things I tried to change was the parliamentary calendar. Back then, you basically got a week's notice that the House was opening; you better cancel everything in your life and get on with it. Now, one of the changes that we have made is we have a fixed parliamentary calendar that's usually pretty consistent, except for times like this where we

are now where, obviously, there are circumstances that dictate it's hard to plan.

But the Standing Orders Committee – and I have some information there. The Committee itself met 14 times in the last session. In 3½ years, we met 14 times. During those times, in 2016, we made six changes; 2017, we made 12 changes; 2018, we made three changes; 2019, we made one change; and just in this House yesterday, we made another change. So we have shown that as a government we're willing to meet, and we've shown that we're willing to talk. Those changes were not made by government. They were made up by a committee from Members of all over. I can tell you that the Committee did not turn down a single request for issues to be considered.

Now, I will give the largest part of the praise to the staff that sit in on the meetings and do the research, the jurisdictional scans of which we have had done. Again, we sat down in 2015-2016 and said: What are the issues we have in the House? What are some of the things we want to make better? And there were so many. We talked about petitions. We made them easier in terms of the wording. We talked about Wednesday sittings – that wasn't there. We said let's sit down on Wednesday mornings and get more work done.

We changed filibusters. I sat in that Opposition, and there are Members there sat on this side, we were there four days straight. We made the Legislature more family-friendly, and it was agreed on by all.

Just looking at some other changes, we talked about – I'm trying to remember now. We looked the Estimates for budget. We looked at legislative committees, that's something that we're going to see here, is a legislative committee overlooking legislation. That's why I bring it back to perhaps the greatest point that I want to make, which is I'm explaining why I can't support the recommendation, because I think it's a predetermination.

Now, we'll get into the partisan – again, the Member for CBS says: well, we're asking questions and we're not getting these answers. And I get what he's saying, because he's passionate about the points he's bringing up, but

sometimes changing this here will not change the information. If government policy is contradictory to the policy position that you hold, changing Question Period or mandating that it be changed will not change the information if the policy stays the same, and that's why I can't support the resolution.

Again, the Leader of the Official Opposition sits on the Standing Orders Committee – I'm happy – and I know the Member for St. John's Centre does; Mr. Speaker, you do, as well my colleague here for Natural Resources. This should be one of the first items we discuss at the first Standing Orders Committee meeting. Let's put it on the agenda. Let's do the jurisdictional scan, of which I've already got some of that work done. We've looked at Question Periods from across the way.

It's interesting, I think the leader brought up the UK. The UK on this leader's day, yes, you have to submit your questions in advance, in writing, and they'll pick 15 out of 30 of them and put them in no particular order on a sheet that you get the answer then. I don't think that's somewhere we want to go.

I don't like Question Period in Ottawa where you see backbenchers asking softball questions of ministers. We've talked about that here. I'd never want to see that. I don't think that serves any purpose, but I'm open to looking at what other jurisdictions do, and there's change everywhere. Some are 25 minutes, some are 30, some are 40 and some are 50. Can we have the consideration of a leader's day? Why not consider it? I'll consider anything. What I'm saying is that up until this PMR was entered, that request had never been made.

What I'm suggesting is I can't support a recommendation that says you should do this and it lays out exactly what needs to happen, because I can't say that that's right. I can say that, through the Standing Orders, we have taken positions that were contradictory to the general feeling of what a government should want to do. We changed the filibuster.

In Opposition, I mean the Opposition would want the ability that they have now, which is at 12 o'clock this House closes. As a government, you do the filibuster to keep everybody sat here

and we're going to pound it through and wear you down. We took away government's right to do that, because we didn't feel it was in the best interests of the Members and the people we serve. Now that does not happen. We shut down at 12, you come back the next day.

So we've shown that we're willing to do – we've laid out our calendar a year in advance. Governments used to have the ability to show up when they wanted and do what they wanted. That has changed, because it was best for the people that we serve.

What I'm suggesting to Members – and that's why I haven't gotten into some of the partisan back and forth. I will say, my colleague – I have tremendous respect for the leaders who talked about the long rhetorical tirades of ministers, it's 45 seconds. It is 45 seconds.

Now, I get the long rhetorical tirade of budget debate because it's 20 minutes. I get what the Member is saying, too, about sometimes during money bills or budget debates we stand up and there's absolutely zero relevance to perhaps that particular episode. Again, that's not an affliction that affects only one party or one person, that goes around here. That's why we've actually said let's look at the budget debate itself.

The budget debate we do now is not the same as it was in 1990. We need to change that. How can we do a better job? That's why we made the changes. We've made changes to Estimates committees; we've made changes to Executive Council. So we've shown we're willing to do that, but I'm only willing – in my opinion, I can support change upon proper review. I cannot support dictating that the committee come back with a predetermined recommendation that may not make this any better or may have unintended consequences.

Having sat on both sides, I know that Members say we're asking the questions and we're not getting the answers. Well, I can say sometimes the questions need to be reformed. Sometimes the questions are partisan in nature. That's what drives us here. We ask questions and we can frame the wording to make them the way that we want to and sometimes to reflect badly on government.

I look at some of these Legislatures, they have rules saying you cannot ask any question that's not based on government policy. We've had questions here that had nothing to do with government decision. It had to do with caucus decisions. It had to do with outside stuff, and they're all answered. In some places that's shut down by the Speaker before you even say go.

I will say that the Member opposite said they shouldn't be afraid for a minister to stand up and say I don't know. Now I can say I did that today. I don't mind doing that. I didn't have the answer. I don't have that dollar figure and I'd rather stand up and say: you know what, I'll get you the dollar figure. Because it's accurate, rather than stand up – but I know one minister yesterday stood up and was asked five questions and said: I don't have the information. I don't have the information. And every time the question came back it said: that's not acceptable. So there has to be a change. Not just on this side of the Legislature, there has to be a change on both sides.

What I'm saying to you, Mr. Speaker, I think I've explained why I cannot support this, but I think I've also given an invitation to all Members. Let's look at the Standing Orders Committee, let's take this issue, let's study it and let's come back here in the fall and have a debate on how can we make the Question Period better for all of us, because what's good for one of us is good for all of us, and that in turn is good for the people that we serve.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** The hon. the Member for Mount Pearl North.

**MR. LESTER:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It gives me great pleasure to rise to speak to our PMR today on behalf of, not only the constituents of my lovely district, but of the people of the province.

I'd just like to reread the original PMR. It said: BE IT RESOLVED that the Standing Orders Committee be directed to undertake a scan of Question Period rules and procedures in various

jurisdictions and bring forward for consideration during the fall sitting of 2019 a recommendation to amend the Standing Orders of the House respecting Oral Questions to require Ministers to answer questions in a manner which is brief and to the point and relevant and responsive to the question.

This is basically a concept that emerged from hearing from our constituents. I know in 2017, when I ran in the by-election, despite the controversy of Muskrat Falls, I heard far more concerns and issues raised about the conduct of the House of Assembly, the goings on of Question Period. This is not just a concern of the previous administration, this is – again, like my colleague from CBS referred, this has gone on since this House was inception. We're getting the pressure from our constituents, and so we should, because those are the people we are really answerable to, to change.

We've seen the acceptable behaviour in this House of Assembly rapidly change. Heckling was commented to. The Member for Burgeo - La Poile referred to physical threats against one another. That's just not acceptable. Those types of actions still happen in what we call democracies in less civilized areas. We don't have to go too far south of the border for that to happen, but those are exactly the type of actions and perceptions of the general public that give us a tarnishing.

Every one of us come in to this House of Assembly to serve the people, to make a difference, to make it better for future generations, but when we're tarnished with the public's perception, largely based on our own behaviour, it makes it more difficult for us to do the virtuous job that we have been elected for, and that's not only just to govern. That is to represent every citizen in our district and our province, from the very youngest to the oldest, from the people who are our staunchest supporters to the people who were, I guess, our staunchest opposition. That's part of democracy.

A lot of the issues we address here in the House are very passionate to us. They often affect families and individuals' basic needs in our districts. They affect spending programs. They affect how we are perceived as representation of our district. So we will get impassioned about it.

We will at times try to gain, I guess, what we'd call political credit, but that cannot be at the detriment of the function of this House.

When I walked in this House, in this room, it was quite awe inspiring because the last time I had actually stepped in on this floor, I was still in grade school, over 25 years ago. I believe in my maiden speech I said that the pressure and power of this very room, the function of this room was humbling. So what we do here is beyond politics. It has to be looked at as practical. When you come to Question Period, practical is what needs to be applied.

The Members for Burgeo - La Poile and CBS both referenced the style of questioning back and forth, and questions are basically query-driven. They're query-driven to get answers for an issue that has to be raised. And yes, it may take, as an Opposition, some style amendment as well to really focus on the issue that needs to be answered, the issues that are generated from our constituencies, the issues that are generated from our critic roles, and take some of the bite out of it when it comes to a political capital attempt.

At this time in our province's history, we're in a very crucial point where we're kind of almost at a fork in the road. We can choose to take charge of our own destiny. We can choose to take charge of where our spending is going and where our programs are going, and how we're going to be able to serve the people, or we can just sit there and someone is going to lead us down the other road. I don't think anyone of us in this Legislature would be proud to say that we were part of that.

As this situation presents us, in a minority government, we have act collectively together as the most assertive majority to make the decisions and not worry about political capital. We have to put practical in place, and that will come from getting the answers to the questions driven by the people and the critic roles that we are assigned to.

Often, I get emails at the end of day, and being a very practical guy it's often quite frustrating for me to ask a question, which the answer is very defined, and not get the answer back. Basically, the minister will stand up and say well, I thank you for the opportunity to get up and speak. No,

it's not the opportunity to get up and speak, it's the opportunity to get up and address an issue and give the people who have generated that question an answer.

It is not a 45-second commercial for what's happening in the department. It is a 45-second opportunity to either provide answers to say look, respectfully, I do not know the answer and I will provide the people the answer. Because it's generally not us asking the questions, it's the people of the province. We have to, again, pull the partisan issues out of it and realize that these questions are driven by people, driven by industries, driven by people who may consider to set up businesses in our province. That is what we have to do and this is part of it.

How many times have we sat in frustration and had to re-ask a question? How many times have we had a question asked back at us? Again, this is no reflection on the current government. This has happened forever and it has to stop. People have demanded that it stop. We need to reform.

The challenge we're going to have is we cannot make this such an arduous process of evaluation and consideration of other jurisdictions that we get nothing done. People are not going to accept that we are going to continue to consult, continue to evaluate. We have to start to realize – do you know what? We may make a mistake, a small mistake, but that is not something that we can't adjust or fix. If it's something we all collectively support, that is something that hey, look, we all made a mistake together, let's fix it. We can serve the people better, and that's what we have to acknowledge.

I remember in high school – and I'll admit that I was probably a bit of a clown at times in high school. I can remember one of my teachers looking at me and saying: Mr. Lester, I'm going to give you a bit of advice. If you don't know the answer and you don't want to be thought a fool, keep your mouth closed. And I don't mean that in an offensive manner. The reality is if you do not know the answer, it's only human to not be an expert in everything.

If we could say that there was one person who knew all, there would be no need for anybody here in the House but that one person. That's why we are all here as a diverse group.

Everybody contributes to this House of Assembly. Everybody contributes in the form of how they digest the information that comes across both ways. Everybody contributes to this House of Assembly in the form of their life experiences, their educational backgrounds and their business backgrounds. That is how this House functions.

As I said, in a minority position, we cannot – for the want of a better term – be overly cautious. We have to go and take those bold, assertive steps that we need to do, as a governing body, as a complete Legislature, not just as government and not just as Opposition, we do need to work together.

The people have asked us to do this. The people have given us the mandate as each individual, elected MHA to work together, to share the political risk of making those decisions that, as I said, we need to make. We need to make those bold decisions right now. Now, in this point of the juncture in the road, is not a time for extreme caution, it is a time for assertiveness, co-operation and decisive action to put our province back on the right course that we all know can surely travel down this road of what we call existence. That is where we need to be.

The set of rules that we live by are not only what's given and outlined in the Members' Code of Conduct, it is what society perceives us as politicians, as their representatives, what they expect of us. Do you know what? That expectation is climbing – that expectation is climbing. As time progresses, they expect more. They don't expect that the shelter of the House of Assembly will condone inappropriate action. They do not accept that the form of heckling that has carried on in the past, that has no acceptance in the public.

Even when it comes to – and again as my colleague from CBS referred – the very, very tiring and stressful situation of harassment, which we all dealt with and, despite the emotions that ran quite high at times, I believe that this Legislature has emerged as a much better place and all of us have learned from the situation that we were faced with.

Largely, it was generated by our behaviour and our perception as MHAs and politicians did not

evolve as quickly as society's perception and level that we need to be held to.

So we have to keep our ear to the ground all the time. We cannot, at any time, take for granted the position that we've been privileged to hold. We cannot, at any time, think that our constituents are not right. We have to listen to everything that our constituents say. No matter how erratic it may be, there is always something to be learned by every email, every telephone call that comes to our offices. There is always something that we can learn from it. There's always something that we can step forward with and improve.

When I first stood in the House, as I said, aside from the pressure of being so powerful within – the feeling of power within, I was pretty naive. I had never stood in a political forum before. I often joke and say most of my constituents prior to coming into politics couldn't even speak human. That was a big thing –

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. LESTER:** Yes, they are the best kind to be around. I tell everybody my best friend is my horse because it agrees with everything I say, but that's beside the point.

So when I stood and spoke and asked my first question, coming across from the other side was this noise and this distraction. I wasn't used to that at all. But I can tell you one thing right now, everything in this House of Assembly, we've gone miles in the past year and a half. But there is still far to go, and that's going to require all of us to work together.

As I said, and I cannot say it enough, we have to be assertive, decisive and forthright. We have to act without the fear of political consequence. We have to act in the best interest of all our constituents, whether they were supporters or not. We have to act in the best interest of the old and the young, from east to west, from north to south, of all different races, of all different genders. That is what we were elected for: to act in their best interest.

Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER (Trimper):** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for St. John's West and the Minister of Natural Resources.

**MS. COADY:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

It's my pleasure to have the opportunity to stand here today. First of all, I'd like to thank the people of St. John's West for their support and their encouragement. It certainly was a pleasure to have many opportunities on all the doorsteps of St. John's West over the last number of months during the election to speak with people about their issues, their concerns, their options and opportunities. So I'm very, very pleased to see that.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank volunteers for their hard work during the election campaign. Of course, I also want to thank my family without whom, I don't think, I'd be able to do anything, Mr. Speaker. They are very important to me, and I know that is true for every one of us in this House.

I want to welcome the new people, those that are joining us for the first time in the House of Assembly. It certainly is an honourable place to do the people's business, Mr. Speaker. It is something that I want to welcome all those returning, as well as the new people joining us.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention that this week is Public Service Week, appreciation week, and none of the people's business could be done without the hard work, extra efforts and really dedication of the public service. So, I wanted to preface my remarks about this.

I will only take a few moments on this very important, I think, motion today that is before us. The motion today really does reflect on how we conduct business in the House. During a democracy, one of the key ways that you hold a government to account is in the Legislature and it is during Question Period that the Members opposite have the opportunity to ask any question of ministers and of the premier and to have the issue adjudicated and spoken of quite profoundly.

I can say – and my colleague who sits next to me, the Government House Leader, has spoken about the amount of effort and work that we have done over the last number of years in improving, what I call, the rule book of the House of Assembly. Everyone in this hon. House has the rule book. I think the date on it is 1951, but there have been improvements and amendments since that time, including 22 changes over the last few years.

As my colleague said, there were only a few meetings during the preceding number of decades, but over the last session we were able to amend 22. So I think you're seeing a real move towards modernizing and updating the Standing Orders, which I call the rule book, and I think that's very important – new provisions. We sit now Wednesday mornings, for example, so we've expanded the working hours. We had changes to quorum, we've had changes to how filibusters work, and my colleague mentioned some of those, and we introduced a parliamentary calendar.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think it's very important to note that these changes are improving the decorum, improving the atmosphere and improving the outcomes of this hon. House. There's more work to be done, and that's why the Standing Orders Committee on the rule book is so very important. But there are lots of considerations around the debate today, a lot of considerations around how do we improve the House of Assembly, and especially Question Period. I congratulate and honour the fact that this was raised. I think it is important. I think there have been really good changes made in this Legislature over the last number of years, and I want to continue to see those changes being made.

I had the privilege of sitting also in Parliament, and I can tell you the decorum in this House certainly is much, much better than what it is in Parliament. Question Period in Parliament is very noisy and questions are not answered as fulsomely as they are here in this House. But there are things like the length of time to ask and answer a question should be reviewed; allowing the independents, for example, to ask a question – that was introduced today, really, to some of the changes that were introduced today, and allowing the independent Members of this

House to be able to ask questions, I think that's a very positive thing.

I know in Ottawa, for example, backbenchers can ask questions. I'm not necessarily sure that that is a very positive – they can ask questions of ministers at all times, of course, in caucus and otherwise, but I'm not sure if it is a good use of Question Period here on the floor of this Assembly.

I was surprised to see the topic come forward today because I want to make sure the people of the province know, because I think it's important for all of us to recognize in this House that any time we have a suggestion for ameliorating the procedures of this House, for improvements of this House, it is a matter of bringing it to those who sit on the Standing Orders Committee. I will say that I sit on the Standing Orders Committee. I know that my two colleagues opposite also sit on the Standing Committee of improving the Standing Orders.

I think it's very important that we bring forward those ideas. There are other ideas, ways of making this House more family friendly. I think in some other Houses people have to bring their child on to the floor so they're feeding them, and that wouldn't be able to happen based on the Standing Orders we have today here in this House. So there are things that we have to continue to improve. I think it's important that we continue to work towards that end, Mr. Speaker.

I will say that I am very supportive of continuing to review the Standing Orders of this House. I am concerned, as my colleague before mentioned, that the language in the current resolution does mean that we're going to be definitive in how we're going to address, that we will have those recommendations and that they will be brought forward and that there is time limits on that. I think it's important that we get this right. It's important that we do a jurisdictional scan. As my colleague mentioned earlier, there have been jurisdictional scans done and we do know that there are improvements to be made. I mentioned a number of them: maybe time limits on our questions. I'm looking to my colleague opposite to see – I do know that there are other speakers today and whether or not they

would like us to address them at this point in time.

Mr. Speaker, I will say it is very important to continue to update the Standing Orders of this House. It is very important to continue to consider ways to improve the outcomes of Question Period, ways to improve the outcomes of the questions that are asked, ways to improve how we conduct our business.

I heard at the doorsteps as well they want us to continue to improve the decorum of this House. I think it's very important that we recognize that this is the people's House. They are adjudicating how we present ourselves. As my colleague opposite said earlier, that reflection on one is reflection on all.

I will take my seat on that note, Mr. Speaker, and allow Members opposite, in the time remaining, to have their say. But I again say this, I am supportive of ensuring that we continue to address and modernize and improve the Standing Orders of this House. I have some concerns about the current amendment before us, even though it has been improved, I think, somewhat, but I still have concerns about the current amendment and perhaps we could have better discussion to ensure that we continue to improve it.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

The hon. the Member for Topsail - Paradise.

**MR. P. DINN:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm happy to rise and speak to this resolution. I think most of the comments made today by all parties, all individuals involved, indicate that, yes, there is some need to address our question and answer period, or Oral Questions as it's called now, hopefully, answers.

We look at it, and it's not intended to put government on the spot, to put our Third Party on the spot, to put our independent representatives on the spot, or put us on the spot. It actually puts us all on the spot to come to this



House to ask relevant questions and expect relevant answers.

When I look at the Standing Order on Oral Questions, subsection (3), it states: “In putting any oral question, no argument or opinion is to be offered nor any facts stated except so far as may be necessary to explain the same; and in answering any such question, the Minister is not to debate the matter to which it refers.”

So when we’re talking about questions and answers in Oral Questions, the onus is on both of us to ask the questions and to expect the answers. We know that from talking to our residents at the doors, that the residents look to us and they want answers.

We’re asking questions on behalf of our residents. Our petitions are on behalf of our residents. We need and require answers to those questions, and, as we’ve said already, there’s no harm in saying you don’t know. There’s no harm in saying we’ll get back to you. There’s no harm in coming up with the questions.

I won’t belabour that because we’ve done a lot of collaboration here today. We’ve been back and forth talking about this and a couple of amendments. It’s wonderful. No one says we’re going to push for the collaboration, but I think we’re working on that.

Here we go, because I want to present another amendment to this.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** (Inaudible.)

**MR. P. DINN:** Yes, we like recess. So here we go again.

This is seconded by our Government House Leader opposite. Collaboration, here we go again.

BE IT RESOLVED that the Standing Orders Committee be directed as follows: to undertake a scan of Question Period rules and procedures in various jurisdictions; to do a comprehensive review of the Standing Orders with respect to Oral Questions; and to bring forward the results of this review for the fall sitting of the House of Assembly.

**MR. SPEAKER:** (Inaudible) seconder?

**MR. P. DINN:** It is seconded – yes, seconded by the Government House Leader.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Okay. We will quickly recess to consider the amendment.

Thank you.

### Recess

**MR. SPEAKER:** Order, please!

May I say that this House has challenged the minds that are sitting at this Table and around me today, and who wants to have procedures get in the way of good collaboration?

So with the consent of the House, I would propose that the following statement be the iteration that we would now finish and conclude our debate on:

BE IT RESOLVED that the Standing Orders Committee be directed as follows: to undertake a scan of Question Period rules and procedures in various jurisdictions; to do a comprehensive review of the Standing Orders with respect to Oral Questions; and to bring forward the results of this review for the fall sitting of the House of Assembly.

If I see consent in the room, I would propose that we would continue with this as our PMR.

**AN HON. MEMBER:** Okay.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Okay, thank you.

The hon. the Member for Humber - Bay of Islands.

**MR. JOYCE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I’m just going to stand for two minutes, because my colleague for Mount Pearl - Southlands is going to speak also. I’ll just say we’re going to support the motion.

There’s one thing I didn’t like in this House years ago, was heckling. I was never much of a heckler and I didn’t like –

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. JOYCE:** So, Mr. Speaker, I'm just glad that we're all working together now and we can get things – but on a bit of a serious note. I remember the days when we were here – we go back to Bill 29 when they almost beat you down to try that we change. And you go to Muskrat Falls, it's almost like stay for three and four and five days, and all that was changed through the Standing Orders Committee.

I think it's great that if we have issues – because it's going to be working in the favour of the Opposition and the government, and in the next election it may be changed again, but it's good for everybody in the province. So what you do now is going to be good for the next 10, 15, 20 years.

I just want to stand and say I support that. I look forward to the reports coming back from the Standing Committee. I agree that what we have to try to do somewhere is get the answers for the people of the province – not us in this House, not us. It's the people out there who elected us that we need to try to get answers for.

So, I just want to say I support it. I'm going to sit down and let my colleague, the Member for Mount Pearl – Southlands, have a few words. I see the going back and forth with the government, the NDP and the Opposition, how everybody was working together on the amendments and it's just great to see.

Thank you.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

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

**MR. LANE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I, too, will be supporting this amended PMR. I did understand what the Leader of the Official Opposition was saying and what his concerns were, that we didn't want to restrict ourselves to just one portion of Question Period but to look at it more holistically. I think that's a great idea. It is great to see – as my colleague has said –

that everyone really seems to be working together. It's a refreshing change. I'm sure that anybody who is watching, the people are very pleased to see that.

I would just make one little point, and it ties into the whole idea of Question Period and why it is so important. I had one question today – and I thank everybody for making that happen, for me and my colleague to have questions in Question Period, but I get one question a week. I thought it was a very straightforward question.

The question was basically around: Will the government bring in legislation that if a company, if a numbered company, and they are receiving any benefit from government by way of grants or tax breaks or so on, will you bring in legislation that would require the directors of those companies, those names to be disclosed? And instead of getting an answer to, I thought, a very straightforward question, I got an answer from the Minister of TCII basically talking about Canopy Growth and it was a great deal and blah, blah, blah.

I'm not asking about Canopy Growth. I'm asking about any numbered company receiving money from the government in any fashion that we know, and the people know, who the directors of those numbered companies are. That was a classic example of my one question that I did not get an answer to.

So, I think it's very important that we amend legislation, amend the Standing Orders so that that type of thing doesn't happen in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**MR. SPEAKER:** Thank you.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** I now call on the Member for Windsor Lake to conclude the debate, please.

**MR. CROSBIE:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We were going to have a social after work today – that's us in the PC caucus – just to mark the occasion of the swearing-in and all of the solemnity and celebration of that. I even heard someone suggesting why not invite the Liberal

Members. I don't think we should get drunk with collaboration quite yet.

I do want to congratulate everyone in this Chamber for the spirit of collaboration with which this resolution has gone through repeated refinements and is now, I think, acceptable to possibly everyone in the Chamber.

In preparation for remarks, I had a look at my father's book, *No Holds Barred*, which dates back to the late '90s. The Speaker was kind enough to remark on the presence of my father, the hon. John Crosbie, on Monday for the ceremonies. I looked up what he had to say about Question Period. It's not a great deal, but there were some anecdotes. On one occasion, he was criticized by a Member opposite for putting his foot in his mouth. He said that he'd rather have his foot in his mouth than speak with a forked tongue.

So I think that expresses somewhat of the spirit of what we're trying to do here. Sitting here and listening to the remarks of all Members, there's a general sense in this Chamber that the uses of Question Period, which involve the accountability and the holding to account of the government of the day, can be reviewed and looked at and updated as necessary. Concepts such as the relevance of an answer, the responsiveness of an answer should be considered by the Committee on Standing Orders. Even though those concepts may not be mentioned in the actual text of the resolution at this moment, I think it's generally understood that those ideas are part of what we're going to be reviewing, that the Committee will be tasked with taking a hard look at how to improve Question Period and improve its function of ensuring accountable government.

What else should I say?

**MR. BRAZIL:** You're good.

**MR. CROSBIE:** My House Leader says I'm good.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** And given it's the Member's birthday, we'll take that as a signal.

Is the House ready for the question?

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.'

The motion is carried.

Congratulations.

**SOME HON. MEMBERS:** Hear, hear!

**MR. SPEAKER:** This being Wednesday and in accordance with Standing Order 9(1)(b) this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 o'clock.

Thank you very much.